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GIDEON FLEYCE

III.

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GIDEON FLEYCE

A NOVEL

BY

HENRY W. LUCY



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY.

1883

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GIDEON FLEYCE.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

NOTICE TO QUIT.

It was high noon when Gideon awoke after the midnight walk which closed the perturbed Sabbath-day. Probably he would not have wakened then but for the interposition of the butler, who had communicated the alarm to the other servants. Mr. Parker felt a personal interest in the condition of his master, since there could be nothing so detrimental to the prospects of a butler whose tastes ran with small, quiet families than that anything dreadful should have happened to his master in the night.

Of course, it would not in any measure

be his fault. But small, quiet families are inclined to take narrow views of things, and among their prejudices is one against a butler, however quiet and respectable in himself, who had left a family owing to painful circumstances connected with the sudden termination of the existence of its head.

Therefore, when Mr. Parker turned up at frequent intervals outside Gideon's door, coughed in an unostentatious manner, rattled the handle, and once bending down and feigning to have heard his master call, cried, 'Yessir!' through the keyhole, he was not wholly influenced by consideration for his employer. He had been told not to disturb Gideon, and lifelong instincts warned him not to disobey orders peremptorily given. But there was nothing said against rattling the handle of the door, or even letting fall outside the butler's tray, and breaking three tumblers, which, to do him justice, he had carefully selected as being already cracked.

This demonstration having no effect upon the sleeper, it was decided, after a council of war held in the housekeeper's room, that it was the duty of Mr. Parker determinedly to rattle at the door till he either received an answer or till, by the prolonged silence inside, he was justified in having the door broken open.

He rattled Gideon out of a sound sleep in which he was enjoying by anticipation the delights of being introduced to the House of Commons by whatever distinguished members might be induced to undertake the task. Gideon heard the thundering cheers from the Liberal party which hailed the victory that had wrested from Tory possession a borough hitherto regarded as impregnable. The cheering was so incessant that he could not catch a word of the oath administered to him by Sir Erskine May. He grew increasingly troubled at the uproar, which finally woke him, and he became aware of the fact that the sound which in his dream had seemed an enthusiastic burst of

cheering was Mr. Parker rattling at the handle of his door.

When Gideon rose and dressed he was conscious of a tremendous appetite, and when he had satisfied it at the breakfast table, things took on a roseate hue in cheerful contrast with the murky clouds of yesterday. The fever that had been coming upon him was routed during the sound and, until morning, dreamless sleep he had enjoyed. He arose a new man, and, looking out upon the world which yesterday he was ready to leave by way of the marshes, he saw it was not, after all, so bad.

Even in the moment when he had come upon Mr. Tandy in the road there had occurred to him an idea of a way out of his difficulty. Mr. Tandy was pretty well off himself. But, in any case, as the trustee and solicitor for many well-to-do families, he would have the command of a sufficiency of loose cash to meet Gideon's present needs.

It would not do for him to disclose to Mr.

Tandy the exact state of his affairs, and why should he? The accommodation he required was quite temporary. If he could get an advance for twelve months for the 3,000*l.* it would afford him even more time than he should need for its repayment.

There was a little difficulty about the security, seeing that every rood of land he possessed was already mortgaged. But that was a private transaction with his banker in London. It was no use troubling Mr. Tandy with all these particulars.

It was not quite the thing, and might have an ugly look if it ever came out in the light of day. He could not properly effect a second mortgage on his property without making full disclosure of earlier transactions in the same direction. But full disclosure meant taking Mr. Tandy into his confidence, and showing him on what a delicately built foundation his fortune rested. He need not tell Mr. Tandy too much, or indeed anything. Perhaps he

would not even want a mortgage executed. If he did, it could be done well enough, and no one be any the wiser.

He lost no time in seeking Mr. Tandy, and found that gentleman eminently accessible on the point submitted. But he must have the thing done in due form, and took instructions from Gideon for drawing up the mortgage deed. With this duly executed there would be no difficulty about the money, and Mr. Tandy, recognising the urgency of the case, undertook that the 3,000*l.* should be placed to Gideon's credit in time for him to satisfy the just aspirations of the free and independent electors.

Gideon did not quite like Mr. Tandy's insistence on the deed. He knew that if the law took cognisance of the transaction it would regard it with a prejudiced eye. But there was no help for it, and there was no danger. Mr. Tandy was a sensible man, and kept his own counsel. He would have the 3,000*l.*, and the election was safe.

With his spirits elated by this deliverance from trouble, and with a face once more rosy and beaming as of yore, Gideon walked the streets of Saxton, and received the homage of its inhabitants. Never was there such a popular candidate. The children ran after him huzzaing at his heels. Gideon did not particularly like children, but he knew what was expected of him, and beamed upon the youngsters in a way that moved their mothers' hearts, and gained him powerful friends in every household. He generally had a bag of highly coloured sweetmeats which he judiciously distributed.

Beyond this, as he sometimes explained with a look of genuine regret, he could not go at present. But he so managed to emphasise this limitation of time that visions of future benefactions swam before the eyes of frugal housewives, new birth of those dreams of parcels of tea, hundredweights of coal, and flannel petticoats noted as having their day at an early stage of the canvassing.

Captain O'Brien had now taken up his quarters in the town, and did not propose to leave till the election was over. From first to last he had been down a good deal, and had had many interviews both with Gideon and Mr. Tandy. But, in accordance with his tactics, he had not appeared to take any active personal part in the campaign. He did not speak at the meetings nor visit the electors. But in his room at the Blue Lion he held all the strings that made the show dance, and, as Gideon admitted, he was thoroughly earning the handsome fee by which his services had been retained.

Just now he was exceptionally busy with preparations for the great fête that was to take place at Castle Fleyce on Friday, when all the Liberal gentry, from the Lord Lieutenant downward, were to rally round the Liberal candidate, eat his cold fowl and ham, and drink his iced champagne.

This had been Gideon's idea, and O'Brien

had rather shrunk from it at first, as impossible or at least full of difficulty. But the Napoleonic manner had had its way. Gideon had stubbornly stood by his proposal, and O'Brien, commencing to work without much expectation of success, found, to his surprise, that difficulties vanished, and that the meeting promised to be a great success and an enormous impetus to Gideon's cause at the poll.

As he walked with Gideon through the town he saw afresh how well the candidate had worked the lower strata of the electors. The 'Longshore men were with him to a man, and more enthusiastically than ever since his appearance at the otherwise unhonoured grave of Long Bill. But Gideon's future career would be all the easier and more in accordance with his plans if he could get in not only by a substantial majority, but with the favour alike of the 'Longshore men and the county families.

Many of the guests bidden to the feast on Friday were not electors on the borough

register. But they bore names which in the borough as through the county were held in high respect, and Gideon shrewdly calculated upon the effect of their being found hobnobbing with him at his baronial residence on the hill.

Gideon was in such good humour with himself and the world that he had been only momentarily discomposed by the receipt of the letter which Jack Bailey had written him on his return to the office. The communication was not lengthy. Indeed, Gideon thought it was insolently curt. It did no more than present to Mr. Gideon Fleyce the compliments of the Editor of the 'Beacon,' who much regretted his inability to use Mr. Fleyce's contribution, having already made arrangements for reporting the occurrence dealt with.

'What does this insolent cub mean?' he had said in flaming wrath, tossing the letter across to O'Brien, who sat with him at breakfast.

'I suppose he means what he says,' O'Brien

remarked quietly. 'You see, these things have to be arranged for beforehand, and have to be done in a particular way. I must say I think it is highly creditable that he should make no distinction in your favour, and you as the proprietor ought to take the same view.'

'O, I ought, ought I?' Gideon snarled. 'Well, I'll tell you what I did. I was at the trouble to write an account of the funeral which I think you will say when you see it—for you shall see it in print, and in the "Beacon" too—that it's about as pretty a thing as ever you read. It came upon me like a flash. I sat up half the night to write it, and now a young cub who takes my money and eats my bread tells me he won't print it in my own paper for which I pay ten or fifteen pounds every week to make up the deficiencies. We'll see about that.'

Gideon had meant immediately after breakfast to go down to the office of the 'Beacon,' see Jack, and have this out with him. But on

reflection he decided he would write. He had not forgotten his former interview with this terrible youth. He had a nervous objection to scenes, and felt his inability to cope with the imperturbable insolence and ready tongue of his editor. But he could write to him, and this he did in peremptory form, insisting upon the publication of the article exactly as it was written.

The messenger who took the letter down to the office brought it back inclosed with a few lines from Jack, who begged to return Mr. Fleyce's impertinent letter, and trusted he would spare him any further communication. At the same time, Mr. J. Bellamy Bailey begged Mr. Fleyce to accept his resignation of a position which was rendered intolerable by the interference of Plutocratic vulgarity.

Gideon did not know what might be the precise meaning of Plutocratic vulgarity, the penning of which phrase had given Jack much comfort. But he had a shrewd suspicion that

it was not intended to be complimentary, and, after a fashion inherited from his father, he literally danced about the room with rage. After having jumped off some of his heat, he sat down, inclosed a cheque for a month's salary, and bade Jack begone on the spot.

Jack acknowledged the receipt, but intimated that a sense of duty would compel him to carry through an issue of the journal which he had already got well in hand. Thereafter he would leave the concern to the literary direction of Mr. Gideon Fleyce.

This Gideon perceived with unabated rage was a clear advantage left to the enemy. His treasured prose would not be published in the forthcoming issue of the 'Beacon,' and a week later would have lost some of its freshness. Still, in his position, on the very threshold of the election, he could not take those active steps which suggested themselves to his mind, and may be summed up in the proposition, 'Turn him out neck and crop.' Jack was a

personal favourite in the borough, and besides, an open scandal would be made much of by the enemy. He must needs accept the terms offered. But he would get rid of this graceless scamp with the appearance of Thursday's paper, and would be careful when making selection of a successor to obtain one with a finer literary taste, a truer appreciation of good writing, and a juster view of his relations towards the man who paid his wages.

Thus Gideon thrust this awkward business out of his mind and went buzzing about the town as busy as a bee—or perhaps, in view of his bright new clothes and shiny hat, a blue-bottle fly would be the more exact imagery.

In the meantime, whilst the proprietor of the 'Beacon' was thus enjoying himself, and innocently improving the shining hours, it is with profound regret that I have to record other procedure on the part of the editor of that influential organ. Jack had long dropped out of the truly dignified and really noble frame

of mind in which he had bade farewell to Napper. He felt that everything was over with him, that a sudden end had been made of his dream of fighting his way up Parnassus with this fair helpmate at his side. His old spirit of reckless mischief revived, and it occurred to him that before he finally closed his account with Gideon Fleyce he might strike a blow at ignorant presumption, and (though, of course, this was quite a secondary consideration) gratify his personal objection to the man with whom a cruel fate had yoked his high spirit.

Of course there would be a row. He was not sure there might not be even legal proceedings; but what did it matter? People might shake their heads, and perhaps even Napper whilst in public would look grave. But he knew that when their faces were turned away they, and Napper too, would laugh and secretly enjoy the joke. If they didn't, again what matter? Jack felt he did not care a fillip for the wide world and all that therein is. He would

have his jest for his own enjoyment, and if people didn't see it, or seeing it didn't like it, they might leave it alone.

Jack was in a desperately savage mood, and even his bottled stout tasted flat. But when presently he sat down to write, covering sheet after sheet with handwriting rather rapid than readable, his brow cleared, and a peaceful expression stole over his youthful face. He was evidently satisfied with his work, and had found in it that surcease from pain and restlessness for which honest labour is ever the best panacea.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A PARTING SHOT.

THE secret was out on Thursday morning, and if what Jack had desired to create was a sensation, he should have been fully gratified. The 'Beacon,' though not desirable as a commercial property, had always been widely read since Jack's slashing articles on local affairs had illuminated its pages. The population of Saxton dashed down its pennies with reckless haste on Thursday morning, and eagerly scanned the 'Beacon' to see what friend and neighbour had been most lately seared by its lambent flame. But owing partly to the fact that the population of Saxton was limited, and that the support in the advertising columns was not

overwhelming, the weekly accounts of the paper when made up showed that disheartening result which Gideon had more than once bemoaned.

Under any circumstances, to pay 10*l.* a week for the privilege of owning a newspaper, into whose inner office he dared hardly venture, for fear of this young cub in his shirt sleeves, was a poor compensation for the ordinary ills of life. But to pay 10*l.* a week, balance of profit and loss on the current week's account, for such a number as that now published, was a circumstance quite sufficient to account for the saltatory movements which Gideon performed in the room humorously called his study, whither the 'Beacon' was brought to him wet from the mighty press.

Gideon was by no means the first who had seen the paper. The town was ablaze with its reflected light long before the proprietor of Castle Fleyce had thought it worth while to look upon the sheet to see 'what the young cub

had been at this week.' He had approached it with a certain feeling of relief borne in upon him by the reflection that this was the last opportunity Mr. Jack Bailey would have of airing his conceits at his expense; to which privilege was added a certain extravagant sum for weekly wage.

'You may go back to your pot-houses in Fleet Street, my good youth,' he said, smiling softly to himself as he took up the 'Beacon,' and confounded Parker for not drying it.

Gideon had a curiously composite nature, in which there was some leaven of a good-natured sort. If his business were prospering, and if he had no particular cause for complaint with a man, he rather liked him, and would on slight pressure give him a cheque. His was not the good nature that would put itself out in any way to serve man or woman. What there was of it oozed out exclusively in the form of cheques, which, in truth, when legally drawn and there is a balance at the bankers, is by no

means a mode to deprecate, nor even to abuse, as being too common.

But Gideon did this because he had a good deal of money, and did not miss the cheque. It was the easiest thing he could do, and it always gave him the notion of being a commercial transaction. When Gideon gave anybody any money, whatever their opinion of the transaction may have been, his clearly was that it was for value either received or to be received at some future time in some, at present, indefinite manner.

He had cheerfully enough paid Jack his weekly cheques till what he called 'the cheek' of the youth offended him, and raised in his breast a feeling of animosity. Jack evidently mistrusted him, and it was his ambition to be liked and thought a good deal of by the class of whom, in his limited experience, Jack was a distinguished example. He had borne with him as long as it seemed possible to win him over. But when the youth showed himself un-

purchasable, taking his money as a by no means overrated recompense for brilliant work accomplished, Gideon grew to hate him, and felt this morning, even as he was smiling, that he reserved for Jack quite an exceptionally active animosity.

Perhaps the truth is Gideon didn't like any one who was superior to him in some of those particular departments in which he himself hoped to attain perfection. If he had analysed his feelings he would have found this was at the bottom of his personal dislike for that admirable man Parker. Parker was only a butler. But there were many things in which he was Gideon's superior. He was not the rose but he had lived near it ; and the subtle aroma of good society floated round him as he moved about with silent footfall, and bending down confidentially consulted guests as to their preference for 'ock or sherry with their soup.

He didn't like Parker, suspecting that he

was always finding him out in some *bêtise*, and sniggered at him in the sanctuary of the butler's pantry. But at least he could bully Parker, and that estimable individual, who knew on which side his bread was buttered, was mute under his reproaches.

‘Whereas this young cub,’ said Gideon, opening the paper with a flick, his brow clouding over at the thought of J. Bailey, ‘sneers at me to my face, looks over his nose at me with supercilious air when I venture in my own house to make any remark about politics or literature, and when I look in on him at the office and mildly say a word about his nasty pipe and his perpetual porter, orders me out of the room, rent for which I pay.’

Gideon, holding the paper at arm's length, as if it were as detestable to him as its editor, glanced scornfully over the sheet from which he had at one time hoped so much. He was looking for something, and here in the inner

sheet, stuck amongst some paragraphs in small type, was what he searched for. At least there was the heading 'Funeral of Long Bill. Exciting Proceedings.'

The young cub had been as good as his growl. Gideon had up to now cherished a fond hope that after all Jack might hold out the olive branch and attempt to mollify him by printing his beautiful account of the scene at the grave. He would have liked this the more as he did not mean on any terms to make it up with Jack, and if he had against his inclination printed the masterpiece it would have been all to the good, and Jack would have left his employment with the added anguish of having sacrificed his feelings in vain. But here was the dull prosaic account in hackneyed reporting style, simply stating that there was a crowd and some demonstration against the harsh verdict and brutality of the procedure that attached to it.

What a chance lost ! But Gideon remem-

bered that even if Jack had relented he would not have been able to insert the article, seeing that he had returned the manuscript.

‘It shall go in next week,’ he said to himself; ‘I’ll have it worked in somehow.’

At least Jack could not have missed the political significance of the event. Even he, with so little appreciation of his opportunities, would see the opening for a slashing article in which the Blues would be held up to the scorn of the world for permitting their political rancour to follow to his tomb the blameless Bill.

Gideon turned to the leader page, and was attracted, as Saxton had been from an early hour in the morning, by an article prominently printed and boldly headed ‘A Recantation and an Apology.’ It was rather longer than Jack’s ordinary deliverances on political events, and was inspired with a tone of gravity foreign to his habitude. Gideon standing still, and with a

look on his face that could scarcely have been more petrified if he had seen the Wan Wraith whose apparition had been recorded in a previous issue of the 'Beacon,' steadily read through the article.

When he came to the end the condition of petrification ceased as suddenly as it had set in, and it was then that he commenced those saltatory movements round the room already referred to.

'The infernal cub !' he hissed between his clenched teeth, as he crushed the paper with his hands, and wrung it, as if it were Jack's neck. 'The impudent hound ! I'll have the law for this. Here's a pretty return for my having picked him out of the gutter. What the devil does O'Brien mean by planting a skulking, low-lived 'impostor like this upon me ? I'll make O'Brien responsible for this.'

Even in his wrath he gladly seized upon some opening by which personal collision with Jack might be avoided. If he could just have

Jack's head put in a bag, so that its owner could neither scorch him with his bitter tongue, nor scourge him with his contemptuous glances, there would be great satisfaction in wringing his neck, even as he nervously twisted the hapless newspaper. But he feared Jack as much as he hated him, and he looked forward with unalloyed joy to the opportunity of rating O'Brien. He must have it out with some one. O'Brien was in his pay, even as Jack had been ; only he was getting a great deal more. Besides, he was of a more languid manner than Jack, and never turned upon him with bitter retort.

O'Brien was staying at the Castle, and would even now be in the breakfast-room. Thither Gideon rushed with hasty stride, with face as red as a turkey cock, and the mangled paper in his hand.

‘ Have you seen this ? ’ he shouted, with an angry snuffle, and shaking the paper at O'Brien as if it were a stick and he a dog.

O'Brien was sitting at the table with a copy of the 'Beacon' open before him, and was at the moment reading the article with perplexed face. He looked up with a surprised air as Gideon thus broke in upon him, and a slight flush appeared on his cheek as he heard the tone of inquiry and saw the threatening gesture. But Gideon was not the kind of man who had the power of easily offending him, and he answered quietly—

'Yes, I am just reading it, and can't quite make it out. I suppose it is some stupid joke.'

'Joke!' Gideon screamed. 'You call it a joke! I'll tell you what, I don't. I call it an infernal impertinence, and I'm not quite sure that it's not a conspiracy. You brought that fellow down here, O'Brien, and I shall want an explanation from you of this affair.'

'What do you mean?' O'Brien asked, in a tone which if Gideon had not been beside himself

with passion would have warned him of rocks ahead.

‘I mean that there’s all sorts of things going on at election time. We don’t know who we are to trust. There’s influences at work that an honest man like myself don’t understand and can’t be prepared to fight against. There’s Montgomery’s finger in this pie, as plain as a pikestaff, and I don’t know who else’s.’

‘Mr. Fleyce,’ said O’Brien, rising, the quietude of his manner and speech forming a striking contrast with Gideon’s, who was prancing round the room, whilst his voice sometimes rose to a shriek, and then sank to a snuffle that had a hiss in it. ‘You have perhaps some right to be angry, but none to make insinuations of this kind, the meaning of which I cannot pretend to misunderstand. I have done some work for you which you have, I admit, paid for handsomely. But that does not entitle you to address me in this manner, nor does it permit me to remain here another hour. I shall use

the room you have placed at my disposal just so long as will enable me to make up my accounts to this morning, after which I must refuse to hold further intercourse with you.'

'Confound it, O'Brien,' Gideon cried, clutching him by the arm as he stalked past him, 'don't you go and desert me. Of course, I didn't mean anything against you.'

He was whining now, not being constitutionally heroic when resolutely faced.

'I may as well give up the whole thing if you go. This blow is enough to knock a fellow out of time altogether. I will apologise or do anything you like if you'll look over the little burst which didn't mean anything. Upon my word, I'm just beside myself. I don't think a man who meant well ever was treated as I've been, what with one thing and another, some of which you don't know about. Now, O'Brien, sit down like a good fellow, and help me out of this hobble.'

O'Brien had suffered himself to be led back

to the table, reflecting that Gideon really was in a hole, and had been badly treated by a young fellow whom he had introduced. After all, Gideon was sure to think meanly of most people, and what he thought was no matter.

‘That’s all very well, Fleyce,’ he said. ‘You may have your troubles, but it’s a bad thing to go flashing round these horrible insinuations. If you had any sense you would see this is a prank of that wild Irishman. I must say I didn’t think he would go this length. It’s awkward, and may be damaging, being so confoundedly well put, if you will excuse my saying so. But it’s no use dashing round the room like a colt in a paddock, and venting your anger on the paper and your friends. Let us look the thing calmly in the face, and see what is to be done. First of all let us read the article quietly down, and see what we can say about it in a brief paragraph, which should be got out at once.’

Captain O’Brien leaned back in his chair,

holding the paper well before his face, lest he should betray a smile, and slowly read down the article which had fallen like a thunderbolt on Saxton.

It began with a brief *résumé* of the political situation in the borough. It lightly sketched the long connection of the Montgomery family with Saxton, touched upon the arrival of a 'financial gentleman from London,' and modestly referred to its own efforts in his behalf.

'But,' the writer went on to say, 'the lapse of time and the growth of experience have convinced us of our initial error. We have supported the Liberal candidate under the impression that his cause was one in which was bound up the prosperity of Saxton, and the glory of an empire in some quarter or other of which the sun is always visible. After a painful conflict in our own mind we have found that we were mistaken, and the first duty which follows upon such discovery is to make acknow-

ledgment of error. We were lured by the high-sounding principles of Liberalism spoken with trumpet-tongue from Midlothian. We saw in them the purifier of our national politics, and the vindication of England's freedom, not only from incompetence at home and from plotters in foreign politics, but from blood-guiltiness. Under this conviction we honestly and to the best of our ability threw our influence into the scale in support of the Liberal candidate. We have been wrong from first to last, and we take no shame to ourselves if here we make recantation and apology. . . .

‘We wish to utter no harsh words with respect to the gentleman who has honoured this Borough with his candidature. That he should still remain in the Liberal camp we do not wonder at, since the exigencies of private business have hitherto prevented him from acquiring that measure of education and information—of course we speak of political education—that would enable him to form a useful judg-

ment in the matter. It is probable that he is a Liberal chiefly because Mr. Montgomery is a Conservative, and it is unusual for two gentlemen to run in opposition on the same lines. We are sure that to the full extent of his limited capacity he means well ; but we cannot deny that our own conversion to Conservative principles has been hastened by the study brought immediately under our eyes of the poverty of the materials that suffice to make a Liberal candidate.

‘We have no quarrel with Mr. Gideon Fleyce, but rather a feeling of the profoundest sympathy and the mournfullest goodwill. We have travelled together in the same leaking boat, and, contemplating the happiness of our own escape, we could wish it had been shared by him. It is not too late even now for him to retire from a ridiculous position. The privilege of candid friendship enables us to tell him that he has no political aptitude, no social position, and no fuller education than would enable him to pass

the earlier standards of the board school. His ambition to lift himself in the social scale is commendable. But it is for Saxton to say whether it will bend its back for him to clamber up by. We trust not. Our hope is, we admit, in some sense selfish, since if he were to succeed in his ambitious projects we should carry with us to the end the saddening conviction that we had done something to bring about so lamentable a result.

‘This is not personally a pleasing position for us to assume, but, since we have erred, we will not shrink from baring our back to the lash. Before the “Beacon” is again lit up the issue will have been decided, and this is our last word on a contest that will be memorable in local annals. Let the electors of Saxton be true to themselves, true to those Constitutional principles that have made Britain great, true to those associations which bind ancient towns to old families, and true to the instincts of gentlemen, which will lead them involuntarily to turn their backs upon the London money-lender and

stretch out both hands to a neighbour and a gentleman.'

'This is very bad, too malicious to be a good joke,' said Captain O'Brien, throwing down the paper.

'Malicious!' cried Gideon, starting off again in his mad patrolling of the room. He had been quiet whilst O'Brien had been reading, and now blazed away as if he were an automaton and had been freshly wound up. 'Malicious! I call it abominable. Penal servitude would be too good for him. I'm going into the town, and I shall call at the police-court and have the fellow arrested at once.'

'Nonsense, my dear Fleyce; you cannot do any such thing. You may presently, if you like, make out that it is a libel. But, absurd as are our libel laws, you cannot walk out of your own house and turn a policeman upon a man who has written something against you, using the county constabulary

if it were a private hose. What you must do is to get out with the least possible delay a special edition of the paper, explaining in the fewest possible words the meaning of the sorry joke. You might also stick a placard out on the walls.'

'Couldn't you fix it on the other side?' said Gideon, with grateful recollection of his success in the matter of the funeral of Long Bill.

'Well, perhaps we might; all is fair in love and war. I'll draw up something hinting, not to put it too plainly, that our opponents, in the desperation of their cause, have stooped to this expedient, have entered our camp, suborned one of our captains, and sprung this mine under us. Yes, I think that won't be a bad move. I'll come with you down to the office and we'll get it in type, only you must give up your notion of raising the constabulary.'

'Very well, but I'll tell you what, I'll stop the cheque.'

‘ You had better make haste about it then. Jack is not the boy to let a cheque grow creased in his waistcoat pocket.’

And so it turned out. Gideon, bursting in upon the bank with instructions to stop the cheque he had in a moment of hectic generosity sent to Jack in payment of a month’s salary, was blandly informed that it had been cashed two days ago. Not only had Jack spoiled the Egyptians, but he had successfully crossed the Red Sea. He had packed up his things and cleared out of his lodgings on the previous night, and Gideon, left lamenting in High Street, grew terrible in his threats of what he would have done to him had he only been able to lay his hand on his collar.

Failing that, all Pharaoh, floundering in the Red Sea, could do was to hurry forward the printing presses, and Saxton was presently placarded with a stinging denunciation of the perfidy of ‘ the other side,’ who had wrought this evil thing.

CHAPTER XXXV.

‘AND BELSHAZZAR THE KING GAVE A GREAT
FEAST.’

GIDEON, standing bare-headed in the porch of Castle Fleyce waiting to welcome to the ancestral home of the Fleyces the Right Hon. the Earl of Bowbyes, Lord-Lieutenant of the county, and, therefore, the immediate representative of Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen, was a pleasant sight. All the country side was alive with people turned out to see the gentry go by to the great *fête* at Castle Fleyce. Saxton was aflame with the colours of the Liberal candidate. For this momentous occasion enthusiastic supporters had determined to risk legal consequences, and flags floated from the tall amiral before the Blue Lion,

that monument of the phenomenal industry of Long Bill, to which some of his comrades were inclined to trace his early death, and therefrom draw a moral that more than ever convinced them work was a mistake.

Gideon did not know about the flags, otherwise, with his keen sense of what the law would say of anything openly flouted to its defiance, he would have prohibited the display. But he had too much on his mind up at the Castle to pay a visit to Saxton, where his friends, delirious with the sure delight of victory, did what they pleased.

The Earl of Bowbyes (well known in the House during the Parliament of 1868 as Lord Henry Bayley) had thrown himself into the fray on behalf of the Liberal candidate with an enthusiasm checked only by due consideration of his official position. Of course, a Lord-Lieutenant could not do anything in the way of electioneering. This had been distinctly stipulated, and everybody knew through the

‘Beacon’ and other sources of information that this great gathering at the Castle had nothing to do with politics.

The fact was, here was a gentleman of high personal character, great charm of manner, and much wealth, who had recently become resident in the neighbourhood. What could be kinder, or more in accordance with custom, than that the surrounding country gentry should take the opportunity of paying their respects to him in his new house?

That his guests on this particular day should all be Liberals was a pure accident. It was well known that politics would be strictly tabooed at luncheon, and that if any speeches were made they would simply be of a personal and friendly character.

Lord Bowbyes whilst in the Commons had been a strong party man. He had, when occasion offered, and sometimes when it did not, smitten the Conservatives hip and thigh. Even now, in the calmer atmosphere of the House of

Lords, he was wont to bring on occasional thunderstorms. During the long reign of the other party he had been reminded of this natural tendency in more ways than one, but all unpleasant. Now the gage of battle was thrown down, and upon the events of the next few days would depend the continuance of the Conservative party in office. If every man did whatever lay to his hand, everything that was possible to be done would be accomplished. Within the radius of Lord Bowbyes' influence Saxton was the most hopeful battleground. No one hitherto had thought of taking it out of the grasp of the Montgomeries, and if this fellow from London was inclined to try conclusions at his own expense, it certainly behoved all good Liberals to lend him their countenance.

Thus, when Sir Henry Gilbert wrote a few lines to his lordship commending Gideon to his patronage, he promptly seized the cue and generously interpreted the instructions. He

had called on Gideon immediately, asked him to dine at Bowbyes, and, when Gideon sent out the invitations to what he modestly called 'a house-warming,' Lord Bowbyes not only accepted for himself, but let everybody know he was going, and 'supposed he would meet them there.'

Quite in a casual way his lordship drove through Saxton on his way to the *fête*. Everybody knew where he was going, and in those quarters where Gideon's strength lay his drive resembled a royal progress. Some one suggested taking the horses out of the drag and drawing his lordship up the hill in triumph. But the 'Longshore men looked coldly upon this project.

'There's a pretty good rise on that 'ill,' Round Tommy remarked sententiously, 'and this 'ere sort of stage coach comes 'evvy.'

They might have saved themselves discussion on the point, for of course Lord Bowbyes would not have permitted any such thing. It

was quite by chance he went round through Saxton on a visit to his old friend Fleyce, and he could not have anything like a political demonstration.

So the four gallant bays breasted the hill at a trot, and swept in grand style up the drive, at the further end of which was discovered Gideon hatless and radiant, with a white camellia in his coat, and across his waistcoat a stout gold chain of greater massivity than is customarily in favour with gentlemen of non-Semitic origin.

But that was a mere trifle, chiefly noted as forming a contrast to the exceptionally good style of his tailoring. He looked better, too, without his hat, a tendency to early baldness lending an air of great intellectuality to his forehead.

‘Very good of your lordship,’ said Gideon, as Lord Bowbyes clambered off the drag with the combination of caution and agility that pertains to well-preserved fifty.

‘Not at all, Fleyce; not at all. Only too glad to come to your charming place.’

Gideon's blood coursed through his veins with new delight at this familiar and friendly address. He was no longer a Peri at the gates of Paradise, looking with greedy eyes on the joys disclosed within. He was actually inside the gates, with an English peer, not coming with starched manner, and holding every one at arm's length, but one who actually clapped him on the shoulder, called him 'Fleyce,' and spoke admiringly of his 'place.'

Paradise is a big place with various circles, and it was something to be in this outside out. But this was nothing to what would come in time, after that triumphal march up the floor of the House of Commons, when Gideon should lay at the feet of a grateful party the prize already within his grasp.

'I have taken the liberty of bringing Boscobel with me, if, indeed,' his lordship added, turning with a gracious look towards his companion on the box, 'that be precisely the way of putting it. A man who is a wel-

come guest whenever he can find time to go is a prize even at Castle Fleyce.'

'Most happy to see any friend of your lordship's,' said Gideon, bowing effusively to the gentleman who was descending from the box with a caution that contrasted with the lightness of Lord Bowbyes' descent.

'I wish the fellow who invented these confounded drags was condemned to live to be seventy, and then pass two years getting up and down them,' observed Mr. Boscobel, who had stared at Gideon but taken no other notice of his effusive welcome.

'You should have gone inside,' suggested Lord Bowbyes, 'though I thought a young fellow like you was fascinated with driving.'

'Yes, it's all very well when you're up there. But I think no well-appointed drag ought to be without a lift.'

'Oh, very well; when you leave to go home you shall be got out of a first floor window. How do you do, O'Brien, you're

looking quite fresh with life in the country, and perhaps you won't be inclined to go back to the pavement of Pall Mall.'

'Shan't I?' said O'Brien, who had come to the door as the drag drew up: 'stop till I get the chance. The country is all very well for a day or two, but give me the shady side of Pall Mall. That is quite rural enough for me.'

'And me too,' said Boscobel, who had distinguished O'Brien by extending the two forefingers of a fleshy and wrinkled hand. 'The only time the country's worth living in is when it is a passable imitation of town.'

'Thank you, Boscobel,' said Lord Bowbyes: 'your frankness is always charming, and I only hope we may make Bowbyes such a colourable imitation as you love. When you come down again I will have a few hansoms driving constantly past your window. I'll get a newsboy or two to shout the evening papers, a real

policeman to stand where he is least likely to be wanted, and anything else you can suggest shall at least be aimed at.'

'Humph!' growled Boscobel, who liked to have the monopoly of anything approaching humour, and was never so much vexed as when other people sparkled, however faintly. 'I suppose this thing's going to be a bore. Nothing I hate so much as these heavy meals in the middle of the day, where all sorts of people crowd to eat more than is good before dinner, and drink more than is safe so soon after breakfast. Besides, the champagne offered at this time of day to a miscellaneous throng is dubious.'

'I will answer for the champagne,' said O'Brien, 'and as for the company, why, the more mixed it is the more chance you will have of making yourself agreeable.'

Gideon had gone on with Lord Bowbies into the drawing-room—a purely accidental occurrence, and having no reference whatever

to Mr. Boscobel's audible and genial observations on the kind of entertainment to which he had come. He had known all about Gideon before he left Bowbyes, and was prepared to scowl upon him as an upstart, a disposition to which he was the more drawn since he himself, though now received in the high places of society, had one time found occasion to fight his way thither.

He was an immense favourite at dinner parties and house parties, commending himself to persons present by saying, in a smart way, disagreeable things of others who were absent. He was not at this time in Parliament, having reached the final conclusion of a most remarkable tour of constituencies. From first to last he had been in Parliament twenty-five years, and had never represented a constituency a second time. In the House he sat on the Liberal benches, and whenever he wooed a constituency it was under the Liberal flag. But as soon as his seat was obtained he ran up

the death's-head and cross-bones of the Independent Member, issued to himself letters of marque, and set out on a roving commission, firing with charming impartiality on every ship he came across, particularly if it were a small one and did not carry guns.

It would perhaps be harsh to say he had never done any service to his country since he first sat in Parliament. But if he had he carefully concealed all traces of it. He left to others the cares and responsibility of legislation. His the pleasing duty of finding fault. Nature had gifted him with some wit, and he had carefully cultivated a crusty disposition. His style of humour was akin to that of an omnibus conductor. It was rough, yet sometimes irresistible in spite of its coarseness; often poor, but always personal. He cared for no man's feelings, and he prided himself on his perfect independence from party trammels. This gave him many advantages over ordinary men. When he rose in the House no one

knew which side he was going to take, though the odds were rather against his own.

The House of Commons, which desires above all things to be amused, and has a strong leaven of liking for verbal horse-play, encouraged him with its laughter and applause, and when at last he had reached the end of all the constituencies, there was much serious questioning as to how the House was to get on without him.

In truth it got on very well, and society gained what the political world lost. Boscobel, though he sneered at the joys of the country, was highly appreciative of sunny quarters at a pleasant house, and no man visited more. There was, it is true, an uneasy consciousness on the part of the host that when he went on to the next house he would abuse and scoff at the hospitality he was then enjoying, just as he had sneered at that of the house he had lately left. But 'it was Boscobel's way,' and nobody minded it. He was a

great catch at a house party, and, knowing his own value, liberally fixed his price.

The secret of Boscobel's being was selfishness. He had fought for his own hand all through life, at first having had to suffer the ostracism that accompanies the sordid cares of poverty. Then, when money came to him and society permitted its doors to be unlocked by the golden key, it found that the new-comer had a pleasing way of saying disagreeable things about one's friends, and he was welcomed with both hands. He knew what they wanted him for, and guessed what they thought of him; but on the whole he had the better of the bargain. He was set on high at their feasts, had the snuggest rooms in their houses, and was himself competed for as if he were a duke.

This suited him admirably, and the unformulated bargain between himself and his entertainers was scrupulously fulfilled. Nobody attempted to define it, but to all intents and

purposes it was something like that upon which Sir Geoffrey Hudson was admitted to the court of Charles the Second. He was good company, and said rude things without those disagreeable consequences that would have followed in the case of ordinary personages. No one, whatever might have been their secret longing, would have ventured to put Boscobel into a pie, and bring him to table, as befell Sir Geoffrey. Other times, other manners. Boscobel had the run of the house, was cheered by the laughter that followed his sometimes pointed utterances, lived in purple and fine linen, and had a shrewd notion that whilst many people hated him many more despised him. Between this fate and that of Sir Geoffrey Hudson some people would prefer the bodily presentation in the pie. Boscobel would not. He made his own terms upon which he would live with the world, and found them sufficiently profitable.

‘Pettit-Philpott here?’ he asked, standing at the door and surveying the scene.

The guests, who numbered between fifty and sixty of the best people in the county, had formed an irregular lane through which Lord Bowbyes, with his left hand lightly touching Gideon's entranced elbow, strolled, making cheery salutations.

'I don't see Pettit-Philpott,' Boscobel added with a chuckle, as O'Brien, who felt himself in the position of master of the ceremonies, looked about the room to see that things were going on happily.

'No; but he's coming.'

'I thought he would when he heard Bowbyes would be here, and the Finlays, the Spof-forths, the Sackrees, and the Rolfes. If ever there was a toad born into this world with two legs and the faculty of articulate speech, it's Philpott. I heard him three weeks ago talking to Gilbert about this man you have all taken up, pumping him as to his standing with the party, and the length to which they were likely to stand by him. Gilbert, who would swear

Pilcher was handsome, or Rowell honest, if he were backing either as a candidate for a likely place, cracked your man up ridiculously. I could see Philpott was coming round this way. He would hear Bowbyes was sure to turn up, and I expect he will come scraping round as if he had never abused the fellow for a money-lending tout.'

'I never knew him go as far as that,' said O'Brien, 'but certainly he was slow to be moved. This little business here to-day is all Fleyce's own devising. There's a good deal more in him than you think, and probably Gilbert, when he gets him in the House, won't find him so easy to whip as he reckons. But before this was thought of I saw Philpott and spoke to him about the interests of the party, and said it would be a good thing, as his people have been down here so long, if he could take Fleyce up a bit. He would have nothing to do with him then, as I could not say much in reply to his question as to who

else had gone in for him. Now, it's all right in that direction, and he'll certainly be here.'

'I believe Philpott never gets up in the morning without considering whether he would not advance his own interest more by staying in bed. He is,' exclaimed this pure patriot, with a glow of indignation mantling his wrinkled face, 'absolutely the most selfish man I ever met in political life. He weighs everything and measures it in the one scale, hall-marked and stamped "Pettit-Philpott." If he had lived in the time of the flood, and Noah had asked him into the ark, he would have stood by to the last moment waiting to see if on the whole he could not make more by paddling his own canoe. He calls himself a Liberal, but you mark my words; as soon as he gets what he's fighting for and is made a peer he will go over to the Tories. He has been a Liberal because he thought there were more plums in the pie. The result of his calculation is to show that on the whole it is more gentlemanly to be Tory.'

‘It is bluer blood and all that sort of thing,’ said O’Brien.

‘What Gladstone sees in Philpott passes my comprehension,’ Boscobel continued, not noticing the remark of his companion, a habitual conversational charm with him. ‘There is many a man on the back benches who has more experience of Parliamentary life than this heavy, plodding, pretentious clod. But the difficulty is, I suppose, to get rid of a man when you have once got him in tow.’

‘Yes, somehow or other Philpott got a seat on the Treasury Bench; then when there was a new Ministry he had to be provided for. He’s a poor speaker, and when in office bump-tious; but a wonderfully shrewd man when it comes to be a question of what is good for his own interest.’

‘As a rule I don’t like prophesying when things are so close; but I don’t mind forecasting Philpott’s horoscope. If Dizzy’s bowled out, which is not nearly so unlikely as some

people who live in London think, and Gladstone comes in with a majority, one of the first men he'll hear from is Philpott. He'll write him a letter congratulating him on his great victory, and reminding him of the continued fidelity of a certain old colleague. Gladstone will send him an ordinary acknowledgment. Philpott will return to the siege and suggest that perhaps long service might be rewarded by something better than an Under-Secretaryship. Gladstone, who, with all his verbosity, is one of the hardest men in the world to draw, will fence him off. Then Philpott will cause to be dropped in Gladstone's ear the hint that, failing at least an Under-Secretaryship, a peerage would not be unacceptable. Gladstone, who hates the peers, and likes to choke them with mediocrity of this sort, will jump at the offer, and Philpott will go to the other House.'

'All very pretty and precise. I'll make a note of it, and have it ready to confound you with supposing it does not come true.'

‘Then add this to your notes,’ Boscobel continued. ‘As soon as Philpott becomes Baron Pettit he will go clean over to the enemy. It’s all very well for peers of ancient lineage like Lord Primrose to go out-and-out for Liberalism. It won’t do for a new peer. When Philpott once gets his patent of the peerage, he will know he has no more to look for from Gladstone, and he will turn and bite the hand over which yesterday he fawned. It will be his game to assimilate with the traditions of the House, which are all Tory. The other side will, of course, make much of him at first, as one who has been a colleague of the Ministry, and who is now shot out of their orbit by reason of that velocity at which they race to destruction. They will egg my Lord Pettit on for a month or two, till they get him lost, body and soul, to the Liberal party, and then, when he has irrevocably cast off his old friends and benefactors, they will let him see the scorn which, after all, English

gentlemen must feel for a character of this sort.'

'What has Philpott done to you, Boscobel? Has he taken your corner seat at the club? or interfered with the quietude of your rubber? or left the door and a draught open upon you? or talked when you had a little story to tell?'

But Boscobel was gone before O'Brien's shorter catechism was finished. He had been talking, not for the sake of O'Brien, a mere hanger-on in society, well known, it is true, but penniless. He hated Philpott partly for his successes, and it pleased him to foretell fearsome things of him.

Besides, Lord Bowbyes was at the other end of the room still talking to that caddish money-lender, and though Boscobel had nothing of the cad or the snob in his character, if he did by chance find himself in a room with fifty people of whom one was a peer and the rest commoners, he preferred to be seen in the company of the peer.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

‘THE PROUDEST DAY OF MY LIFE.’

It was a very cheerful company, especially now the Lord-Lieutenant had arrived. There was an uneasy suspicion in the minds of many present that they might, as they put it, after all be sold. They hated Fleyce instinctively. What did a fellow like that mean by coming into the sacred precincts of the county, leasing perhaps the oldest building in it, and by means of lavish expenditure of money turn it into a really tasteful habitation?

They had said nothing when the original proprietor had let the Castle go to ruin, and had planted John Cowman and his turnips in the courtyard. A man whose ancestry was

undoubted might do as he liked with his own. Besides, the ruin was picturesque, and, above all, Gertrayke, who owned it, belonged to one of the best county families.

This fellow had nothing but money to recommend him, and though the county families were not insensible to the charms of money—as indeed was shown by their flocking to Castle Fleyce and warmly shaking hands with its esteemed proprietor—they didn't like it in other people's bags, especially when the other person was a new man from town.

The news that the Lord-Lieutenant was going to the luncheon had been diligently spread, and at first dubiously received. Then it came about that there were reports of men who had met Lord Bowbyes and having cautiously started the subject been met with a hearty confirmation of the statement, and an even boisterous command that they also must go.

That was all very well. But Bowbyes,

whilst wanting to do a service to his party by taking up this fellow, might be inclined to do it vicariously. At the last moment he might find affairs of State that would prevent his putting in an appearance, and there they would be.

It was a comfort at the outset that there were a good many others in the same boat, and content was fully realised when, looking out from the drawing-room window over the fair scene spread out before them, they saw winding through the high road among the meadows the unmistakable Bowbyes' team.

As often happens, the revulsion of feeling when a possible disappointment is transformed into positive accomplishment of desire led even to an exceptional exultation. Here not only was the Lord-Lieutenant, but he was walking about arm-in-arm with the host.

Moreover, a rumour had gone round that the elderly gentleman, who was staring at everybody else in such a rude way, was the

famous Boscobel. Every one knew his name. Some had met him at dinner, or at snug country-house parties. These, desirous to shine before their neighbours, advanced to Boscobel with easy step, smiling face, and outstretched hand. Whereto the genial wit replied with a freezing stare of inquiry, and the most frigid and temporary touch of his fingers.

He usually was at this time of the day in a bad temper. On this occasion his normal condition was aggravated by half a dozen incidents. There was the climbing up and down the drag, the prospect of seeing people eat when he was not hungry, the contact with a miscellaneous crowd, and the ridiculous perversity of Bow-byes, who was absolutely making court to a fellow like this Fleyce, when he (Boscobel) was in the room.

Presently he had snarled a clear space of several feet around him, as a man might do who swung a pair of clubs. His ill-humour, like other appetites, grew with what it fed

upon, and if he had had his own carriage at hand he would certainly have ordered it and left the place in a pet. Than which it was impossible to imagine a more dreadful punishment for those left behind.

Pettit-Philpott arrived in due time, very nervous, and possessed in accentuated form with that apprehension of being taken in which had disturbed the equanimity of the other guests. He felt that even in such a case he would have little to reproach himself with. Nothing could exceed the carefulness of the inquiry he had made. An anxious housewife going down to a favourite watering-place with a melancholy foreboding that she and her brood would infallibly land in apartments where there had been the scarlet fever, measles, or small-pox, could not have been more careful in her reconnaissance, than was Philpott in his investigation how far it was safe for him to be found a guest at Castle Fleyce.

He had anxiously come to the conclusion

that it was all right, and earnestly hoped it might be. But who could tell? and what a dreadful thing it would be for a man who might soon be a Minister if he became entangled with inconvenient acquaintances!

Why should he bother himself? There were in the world, and even within the circle of his acquaintance, enough of absolutely safe people with whom he might spend whatever time he had for visiting. But then, he answered himself, this was a speculation, and if it turned out well the profit would be in due proportion with the risk. He must, especially just now, show no hesitation in assisting his party. Gilbert had written to him asking him to take Fleyce up. O'Brien had been at him on the same point, and he was not sure how far O'Brien was within the inner counsels of his party. He had heard of him dining in Harley Street, and, as he said to himself with bitter recollection of shortcomings that had affected himself, dinners were not so frequent in that

quarter that one would be asked unless he were a special favourite.

Then, again, there was Bowbyes, who at Quarter Sessions had stayed behind purposely to tell him he must go. All this looked very well; but when there was at stake so precious a thing as the personal prospects of Pettit-Philpott, it was not easy to avoid anxiety as to possible accidents.

The first thing the anxious eye of the right hon. gentleman lighted upon was Bowbyes in a circle of the very best people of the county, with Gideon at his right hand, and his lordship in the highest good humour. The thing was evidently safe. The clouds cleared from the massive Philpott brow as they clear on an April day when the sun bursts forth.

‘Bowbyes, how are you?’ he cried in a cheery voice, ringing the hand of the noble lord. ‘Mr. Fleyce, I am perfectly delighted to have been able to get here. I have my own borough to look up, you know. But nothing

would have prevented my coming to-day if I could have crawled on foot or been lifted into my carriage.'

'The first way of getting along would have been more in your way,' said Boscobel, who had drawn up to the group when he saw Philpott joining it.

'Ah, Boscobel! you here, and as genial as ever. I had a letter from a friend who was staying with you at Dunrobin on Saturday week. He told me what a pleasant time you all had.'

'Had we?' Boscobel growled. 'I don't remember that aspect of the entertainment. It struck me as being the dullest lot I ever herded with.'

'How are things looking in Scotland?' asked Lord Bowbyes. 'Did you hear anything at Dunrobin?'

'Yes; I heard that Gladstone, if he sits in the next parliament at all, will be member for Leeds. There is something disgusting about a

half-mad politician like that going to storm Midlothian. He might as well turn Buccleugh out of his own park. There will be a good deal of ranting and roaring of the mob, but that does not mean votes, and when it comes to the polling you will see that family influence will have its proper effect. The Scotch are a canny people, and if they can get an entertainment free they will have it of course. They cannot hear Gladstone every day. I never trust a mob.'

'Well, you are an authority on the value of the roar of a mob,' said Philpott. 'You know what it is yourself. You've heard it on the house-tops when the mob has been in the street, and you have been executing strategic movements round the chimney-pots.'

This reference to a well-known episode in Boscobel's wide experience of the humour of constituencies was a very bold stroke for Philpott. He went on the principle of never saying nasty things to a man's face, being care-

ful to make up the average when a man's back was turned. But he and Boscobel were long-established enemies. He knew that the keen eyes of the old man saw right through him, with all his meannesses and selfish aspirations. He would have been exceedingly glad to have cried a truce with so ready a tongue. He had tried that before, and Boscobel had, by way of response, been more than usually rude.

He had pretended not to hear the little reference to the alleged propensity for a certain kind of locomotion with which Boscobel had genially opened the conversation. But he had heard it, and it stung him bitterly. He knew at once that there was between now and the last time they had met no change in Boscobel's feelings towards him, and, always calculating, generally with great shrewdness, he had come to the conclusion to throw away the scabbard.

No one would take seriously what Boscobel might say, if only his victim received the darts

smilingly, and even appeared to invite them by reprisals.

‘Yes, I know a mob,’ said Boscobel, turning fiercely upon his assailant. ‘I know what its roar is like, having pricked its hide, and sometimes been tossed by its horns. That comes of not mincing my words and smiling my smile to my company. There are some men for whom mobs have too mighty a contempt to take the trouble to turn and rend them.’

‘Mr. Boscobel, I want you to see my orchids, if you don’t mind,’ said Gideon. ‘I hear you are a great judge, and I should esteem it a favour to have your opinion.’

Gideon was growing a little nervous at this encounter, which was looking serious, and threatened to spoil the serenity of the day.

‘You must let me join you,’ said Lord Bow-byes. ‘I want to see your hothouses; I hear they are very ingeniously worked into the ruined walls.’

Boscobel graciously permitted himself to be led off, 'like a bear with its keeper,' as Philpott whispered in the ear of Mr. Gertrayke, on whom he immediately fastened himself as being the next most important man in the company to the Lord-Lieutenant.

Luncheon was served at two o'clock, and was like everything else, save the contention of Boscobel and Philpott, a great success. O'Brien had looked after this, and, as he sometimes modestly said, if Heaven had varied the level of his mediocrity with any gift, it was the capacity for the arrangement of a luncheon or a dinner.

Even Boscobel was consoled by the delicate attention paid him. He was put to sit next to Lord Bowbyes, whilst Philpott was assigned a seat lower down on the same side of the table, quite out of his sight. He was accustomed to say that he was a man of no prejudices, but if he had one it ran in the direction of detestation of seeing men guzzling.

For himself, having reached an age at which temperance and regularity in habits of daily life had become a necessity to its prolongation, he was accustomed to eat a light breakfast, take a mutton chop for his luncheon, and reserve his accumulated gastronomic force for his eight-o'clock dinner.

At eight o'clock gentlemen dined ; people eating at any other hour of the day guzzled.

That was the way Mr. Boscobel was accustomed to treat the distinction between the hour at which he ate and the habits of his fellow-men. But here, served before him on a silver dish, were two matchless chops grilled to a turn, and free from the abomination of gravy.

Gravy was one of Boscobel's exceedingly few prejudices. He called it 'mush,' a generic term applied by him to sauces of all kinds. He had been known to leave a house abruptly because on the second night the servant had brought him a spoonful of gravy with his cut of saddle of mutton. Once he didn't mind.

It was ignorance. But to do it a second time was either deliberate insult or gross carelessness. He could submit to neither, so he left the table and house.

This was talked of as one of his 'charming eccentricities,' and had its practical use in securing him from this particular annoyance.

Now here were two chops, served hot and dry, and close at his hand was a decanter of his favourite claret at perfect temperature. Boscobel didn't know what anxious moments O'Brien had spent in the accomplishment of this little surprise. He felt it was quite right that things should be as they turned out. But he certainly had not expected them at a place like this.

'He's just the sort of fellow to ask for a second spoonful of gravy,' he but a moment ago said to himself, glaring upon the innocent host with a sudden accession of disgust and indignation.

But since his luncheon was as it should be,

and Bowbyes seemed determined to make a fuss of this fellow, and as he had put down that crawling sycophant Philpott, the good man relaxed, ate both his chops, drank more than half the claret, and began to sparkle in his best manner, which was exceedingly good.

To Gideon, sitting at the head of the table, the scene was the fairest he had ever beheld, and the company the most delightful. At his right hand an earl, a direct representative of the Crown. On his left, the richest landowner in the county. Close by, talking to him sometimes, and even listening to his remarks, was one of the most famous wits of the day, and down the table on either hand were some of the best people in the county.

He felt very happy, and even grateful to Lord Bowbyes, to whom, with characteristic forgetfulness of all O'Brien's assiduous labour, he attributed everything that was successful in the day.

‘What do you intend to do when you get

into Parliament, Mr. Fleyce?' Lord Bowbyes asked, turning to his host with a pleasant smile. 'Have you, like the late General Trochu, a plan?'

'Or are you like the late Mrs. Glasse,' Boscobel interposed, never missing an opportunity of giving a genial turn to conversation. 'Are you inclined to catch your hare before making consequential arrangements?'

'That's not a bad principle in average cases,' Lord Bowbyes said, 'but this case is a little out of the average. We don't talk politics here, and only learn from what we call in the House "the usual sources of information" of the possibilities of an election down at Saxton. But one cannot be deaf and blind to evidences that Fleyce is to-day as certain to be member for Saxton as the poll is certain to be declared on Monday night.'

'Your lordship is very good,' Gideon simpered, 'but Mr Boscobel is right. We mustn't make too sure.'

‘Very well, you can put it that way. At the same time, whilst it is in my mind, I would advise you to take up some subject when you get into Parliament. Make it your own, and bring it in year after year if necessary, till either you get it passed, or have talked a generation of members into the grave, and followed them yourself.’

‘Fellows that do that always make themselves a bore,’ Boscobel said. ‘Look at Sir Waterford Wilson, with his temperance nuisance, and old Solemnity Nethergate with his convent institutions, and the Home Rule fellows and half a dozen others, who get hold of a hobby and ride it in at one door and out at the next every session.’

‘You might add to your list the Corn Law Resolution and the Church Rates, and the Reform Bill, and half a dozen others, which have been begun that way, and been carried through. Of course I don’t mean our friend Fleyce to start a big topic like one of these, at

least not at present. But I remember when I was leaving college old Pam had a chat with me about going into Parliament, and gave me the advice I am now giving Fleyce. "Get some subject," he said, "however remote its possibilities. Make it your own and bring it in year after year. If it is for a railway to the moon it is better than nothing, and you can surely find something better than that."

'Then take up perambulators,' Boscobel said. 'Bring in a bill to make it penal for a perambulator to be wheeled on the pavement. There's no other country in the world where a man going along the street is in danger of having his shins barked by a three-wheeled conveyance.'

'Wouldn't that be a little dangerous?' Gideon asked. 'During my canvass I always found it worth while to pay my court in the nursery.'

'Yes, that's where Boscobel failed. He never gave woman her true place as a political

power. No man who brought in a bill for the suppression or even the regulation of perambulators would sit a second time for any constituency. But there is one thing seriously worth the attention of any young member, and that is the ringing of church bells. That ought, for the sake of common humanity, to be stamped out.'

'Wouldn't that set the clergy against you?'

Gideon asked.

'I suppose it might. But think of the enormous support it would bring you. I suppose in thickly populated places one church bell blights the existence of five hundred persons. That is a pretty good average to work upon, and there is absolutely nothing to be said on the other side. Bells, of course, are all very well on a village church, though since watches and clocks have come in they have no practical use anywhere. In towns they are simply intolerable. If you took the matter up seriously it would not be difficult to establish a score of cases where murder or manslaughter has been

committed. When any of us are ill we can have our door-knockers muffled, the bells unhung, and the roadway laid down with straw. But we cannot stop the church bells ten doors off from clanging morn, noon, and night.'

'It's very kind of your Lordship to take such an interest in my Parliamentary career. I will certainly think of the bells. Would you propose to prohibit them absolutely?'

'No, you needn't do that. Take a leaf out of Sir Waterford's book. Go on the local option principle. That will do the work quite as effectually, and with less appearance of high-handedness.'

'Scratch a Radical and you'll find a tyrant, especially if the Radical happens to be born heir to a peerage'—with which gentle gibe at his host of Bowbyes Boscobel centred his attention upon his second chop.

Belshazzar the King, when he made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before them, was not more brimful of happiness

than Gideon. He had cast care behind him, and felt that he might look round on the walls without apprehension of seeing start forth the fingers of a man's hand, tracing the fearsome legend—MENE MENE TEKEL UPHARSIN.

Of course, there were to be no toasts nor any conversation about politics held above a whisper. But, as Lord Bowbyes presently said, standing up and holding a brimming wine-glass in his hand, they could not separate from so pleasing a host without wishing health and prosperity to the house under whose roof they sat. Nor would his lordship be satisfied with anything less than three-times-three, which the guests, warmed with wine, and encouraged by the boundless kindness of Lord Bowbyes, gave with a fine heartiness through which was plainly heard the stentorian voice of Pettit-Philpott.

Gideon had thought it just possible that something of this kind might take place, and in the secret recesses of his study had prepared a worthy response. Happily, the kind words of

Lord Bowbyes and the uproarious cheers of his distinguished guests so profoundly affected him that they hustled out of his brain all recollection of the well-balanced sentences.

He rose to his feet and stood silent for a moment, with an awkward consciousness that his eyes were full of moisture, and that he could not command his voice. All that he could remember of his speech was a phrase perhaps not altogether unfamiliar.

'My lord and gentlemen,' he said, 'this is the proudest day of my life.'

With faltering voice he wandered round and round this declaration, making it over and over again, and finally sat down with a strong sense that he had made an ass of himself; whereas, as Lord Bowbyes testified with his natural kindness of heart and his habitual readiness to say the right thing at the right moment, nothing could be more creditable than this little display of genuine emotion.

Lord Bowbyes went off soon after luncheon,

carrying Boscobel with him. Pettit-Philpott soon followed. In the chill which succeeds sunset his delicate constitution was liable to catch cold, and Philpott never ran risks of that kind. Others, gladdened by the good cheer and in the friendliest mood, stayed awhile and smoked Gideon's cigars, which were as good as his wine.

But one by one all departed, and Gideon, standing at the porch, bid them farewell. Many dropped a word in his ear of hearty good wishes for his success on Monday, the day the poll was to be taken, and on the evening of which, unless all human calculation were out of joint, he would be M.P. for Saxton.

He lingered in the porch when the last guest had gone, thinking how sweet was life after all, and how bright the future. The place seemed quiet and deserted now the last carriage had rolled away, and the echo of its wheels had ceased to hum through the glad country lanes.

As he stood and mused he saw two men step out, apparently from behind a tree on the lawn that faced the house. They were strangers, evidently town bred. Probably they had strayed in the park and lost their way. They made straight for the porch where Gideon stood looking at them inquiringly.

He was not in a mood to grumble with anybody, but, of course, he could not have strangers prowling around the inner recesses of his park. The men walked up to him with a business air, and one said—

‘Mr. Gideon Fleyce, I believe?’

‘That’s my name,’ Gideon answered. ‘Did you want to see me?’

‘Yes,’ said the stranger, coming unpleasantly near, whilst the other one closed up on the other side. ‘I have come on business, I am afraid, of an unpleasant kind.’

‘What is it?’ Gideon faltered, his cheek growing as pale as ashes.

He made a movement to withdraw, which

the others, apparently without noticing it, followed up.

‘ We have a warrant to arrest you on the charge of wilful murder. You had better not say anything just now, and we will try to make things as quiet as possible.’

‘ Murder !’ Gideon cried with horror-stricken face. ‘ Who’s dead ?’

‘ Oh ! come now,’ said the stranger, abruptly. ‘ It’s your father, you know. It’s a nasty business, and you’d better take time before you say anything. You must come to London by the next train.’

They took him one by each arm and led him into the house, he walking as docilely as a child, but with a dazed look as if the rough hand of the detective had at its touch broken the machinery of his reason.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN THE SPIDER'S PARLOUR.

The lead is wondrous heavy, mither,
 The well is wondrous deep ;
 A keen penknife sticks in my heart,
 A word I dounae speik.

THE bijou residence in the quiet street off Fulham Road frowned upon the neighbourhood all through that bright Monday morning when Gideon, after his long sleep, awoke to freshened life and brighter hope. At no time of attractive exterior, for the bachelor of fortune now in possession was not given to wasting his money on paint, the bijou residence looked a trifle more dingy by reason of the circumstance that the shutters were closed in the room on the ground floor.

People who lived opposite had occasionally caught glimpses of the bachelor of fortune attired in a rusty skull-cap and a musty dressing-gown, as we have seen him on the occasions when he has been entertaining Gideon or his old and faithful servitor, Mr. Dumfy.

Less than a week ago those who cared to look might daily see him at dusk as he drew near the window to catch the last gleams of daylight, which the setting sun was giving away gratuitously. Half an hour, or even ten minutes, saved at this time of the day made a good deal of difference in the life of a candle. The old gentleman in his leisure moments had worked out a sum which gave really surprising results, and encouraged him to make the very most of the dying day.

He had been seen at the window on Sunday night. He had sat there until the brief twilight had faded into darkness, till fires were stirred and lights flashed from the houses near, and people turned with kindly welcome to the night

which made it possible for them to be so snug under the lamplight and in the cheerful glow of the fire, which toned down all hard lines.

When it came to pass that there was no appreciable difference between the interior of the room with the shutters closed and barred, and the room as it seemed with the great wall of night silently dropped before the window of the bijou residence, the shutters were drawn, with all their mysterious mechanism arranged for the more gratifying reception of possible burglars.

Gideon had seen how tightly they shut when he boiled with angry passion as he walked up and down outside wondering what were the best means by which he might obtain readmittance.

Closed then, they remained closed. They were fast closed when the morning broke, and the sun, still chilly, but bright with promise of the spring, came out and bathed the streets in its light.

Noon rang out from one of the churches

whither Gideon had watched the pleased women troop on Sunday night. The afternoon deepened into dusk. The postman went his rounds, though he had nothing for the bijou residence, where correspondence was on the whole deprecated as involving expenditure of postage stamps. The muffin-man went round clanging his bell, suggesting to some murderous thoughts, and to others cosy meals surreptitiously introduced between luncheon and dinner.

Night fell on the quietening street. Lights twinkled from the many windows. Fires were stirred again; dinner was set forth; cheerful groups gathered round the fireside, and once more the scene darkened, the lights going out one by one from the many windows, till the street was steeped in darkness.

Morning broke once more, and still its rays beat in vain upon the shutters of the bijou residence. All the routine of life went on as before, except that people living near began to take note of the curious aspect of the bijou residence.

Had the bachelor of fortune gone away for change of air, how sorely needed none but those who breathed the fetid atmosphere of the always closed house could know? Was he tired of his lonely life, and had he ridden o'er the downs, either by himself or with promiscuously invited companions, to seek a bride?

The Misses Chante at No 32 opposite began to take a fresh interest in the bijou residence when this thought suggested itself. They had visions of the merry little gentleman with the skull-cap coming home quite transmogrified, scraped and washed, decently dressed, and leading by the hand a buxom bride. She must of course be of a certain age; still she might be nice. The old gentleman was reputed to be fabulously wealthy. Perhaps he would give parties, and the bijou residence would blossom forth and become quite a scene of attraction.

Even if the Misses Chante were not invited, they might sit at the window and watch the

guests arrive, wonder who they were, and pass frank opinions upon their dresses.

A difficulty in arriving at precise conclusions on the matter was that nobody knew the old gentleman's name. It did not appear in any of the directories. The Spider knew by experience that such publication brought begging letters, tradesmen's circulars, and even unsolicited visits. Therefore there was no use in looking through the marriage announcements in yesterday's 'Times,' for they did not know what name to seek. They must wait till the bride and bridegroom came home.

Waiting grew more and more a dreary and uneasy task. It began to be rumoured that the milkman, calling on Tuesday with the supply of milk directed for delivery twice a week, had failed to make himself heard. On Wednesday the ancient beldame who twice a week charred for the bachelor of fortune appeared at the appointed hour with her bucket and floor rag and broom. But no answer was vouchsafed to her

single knock, whilst natural curiosity, endeavouring to satisfy itself by inspection through the key-hole, was foiled by a simple device on the part of the old gentleman, who had pasted a piece of brown paper across the orifice on the inner side.

The old lady was willing to testify that such a thing had never happened before. As for the old gentleman going away for a holiday, she scouted the idea, and was positively rude to young Miss Chante, who, seeing her on the doorstep, had inveigled her across, and incidentally advanced the marriage theory.

The old lady, who was partaking of refreshment at the time, nearly choked with untimely laughter, and when she recovered pursued the young Miss Chante with rheumy gibes for thinking of such a thing.

The policeman on the beat was consulted on the matter, and created a profound impression by standing in the middle of the street so that he might get a full view of the premises.

The result of several moments' silent meditation was the arrival at the conclusion that 'the place was fastened up,' of which fact he made a note in a large pocket-book, produced with much solemnity, and written in with considerable difficulty.

He reported the circumstance at the office, where there was a disposition to regard it seriously. Inquiries were made in which the milkman and the charwoman figured as principal witnesses, and it was settled that, if by Thursday morning no sign of life within manifested itself, the representatives of the law would enter the house and snatch its secret from it, if secret there were.

On Thursday morning the bijou residence still frowned in the old way at the impertinent curiosity of the street. The shutters remained barred and the stillness unbroken. Nobody knew where to go in search of the friends or relations of the bachelor of fortune. But the police armed themselves with the necessary

authority, and amid thrilling excitement an officer from Scotland Yard rapped at the front door.

It was a bold knock, that might have waked the dead if any slept within these tomb-like walls. But there was no answer, nor was any made to successive thunderings at the knocker.

Then the locksmith came forward and set to work. It was not an easy task, for, as he found, no ordinary mechanic had fashioned the lock. Finesse failing, force was called into play. A ram was borrowed from a street paviour, and half a dozen police manning it began to beat upon the portals of the bijou residence.

Bolts nor bars could long withstand this, and presently the door was battered in. As it fell there swooped down from the top a long iron blade so sharp that it cut some depth into the wooden ram on which it fell. In the ordinary course of things it would have fallen on the head of one of the policemen supposing he had attempted to enter by forcing the door with his

own weight. As it was it hurt no one; but the little incident suggested caution in further advance.

There were no more doors to force open, at least not as far as present inquiry went. The door of the room on the ground floor, at the window of which the old gentleman had daily been seen, was opened, giving vent to a decidedly unpleasant flavour.

Turning on their bull's eyes the police entered, and were received by the bachelor of fortune himself, though his appearance was not calculated to make the visit a pleasant one. He was still sitting in the chair in which we saw him on Sunday night, and was now even a less agreeable object for contemplation.

The first human instinct on the part of the visitors was to unbar the shutters and let in fresh air and light on this charnel-house with its ghastly occupant. It was felt to be a delicate matter to tamper with the shutters. But they were safely opened, and the sunlight,

streaming in, made it more than ever desirable to throw a sheet over what remained of the merry old gentleman, with this haft of a knife sticking out from his chest like a note of exclamation.

Things looked very serious indeed, and messengers were despatched to Scotland Yard for higher authority and supreamer intelligence. These likewise were greatly puzzled when they arrived on the scene. There was the safe unlocked, and so far as could be seen untouched. Yet it seemed that the existing condition of things had not been arrived at without a struggle. The key was in the lock, but it was bent downwards as if some heavy weight had hung upon it and had been dragged off by main force.

Inside were the rouleaux of gold—countless gold it seemed to the astonished policeman. No rough hand had been laid upon them. They stood in ordered row. Nor were any of the papers touched. In truth, except for this

distortion of the key it would seem that the safe had not even been approached by the hand that drove the knife up to the hilt in the heart of the old gentleman.

Nor was there any other sign of disorder in any other part of the room.

The police did not see what we fancied we discerned in the firelight on Sunday night—the gleam of demoniac delight with which the old gentleman, looking in the direction of the safe, had fared forth to another and, we hope, a better world. Otherwise they might have made a great deal of it.

No man living or dead could sit for four nights and three days in the same position, and, to tell the truth, when the visitors arrived they found the old gentleman huddled up on one side of the chair, having toppled over from his earlier position.

When Pompeii was dug out they found in the passage of one of the houses the skeleton of a man with ten pieces of gold in one hand and

a key in the other. There were no bijou residences in Pompeii, for ground rent was low, and they built in roomy fashion. But, doubtless, this was an elderly bachelor of fortune, who, when the crash came, had made a dash at his safe, clutched a handful of gold for present necessities, and secured the key, so that presently, when danger was over, and he might come back again, he would find all safe.

Why hadn't our old gentleman made some such move? The ashes that wrecked Pompeii were not more deadly than what had chanced to him. But in his case the catastrophe must have been more sudden. At any rate, he sat in his chair, with his gold untouched and his key in the safe.

Here also within the fender were the remains of the stew, mouldy now, and mouldy the bread, and very sour the four-half, all untouched.

Groping round the room in search of some clue to this great mystery, the police laid swift

hands upon a handsome stick that stood in a corner of the room. There was a silver plate upon it, a little dulled, perhaps by reason of having kept company with the old gentleman four nights and four days under these sad circumstances. But plainly discernible on it was the legend, 'Gideon Fleyce, Castle Fleyce.'

This was a clue followed up with more success than sometimes attends similar able and intelligent efforts. It was not nearly so difficult to find out Gideon Fleyce as it was to discover traces of his respected and now ever-to-be-lamented parent. Gideon was as fond of directories as his father had disliked them. His several addresses appeared in the 'Court Guide,' and before an hour had elapsed the police were on his track.

They found much that was surprisingly encouraging, and what, at the outset, seemed to promise to be a case that would be sure to bring down upon them the reproaches of a self-sufficient Press now literally led along a high road

that went straight up to the porch of Castle Fleyce, where Gideon stood smiling farewell to his guests.

The two strangers who had presented themselves behind the trees were by no means so unfamiliar with the place as Gideon was with them. They had been in Saxton at least eighteen hours, and, when an intelligent police-officer has a clue and eighteen hours to follow it up in, he is not long in making a case, particularly when it has been quite clear from the first.

They knew all about Gideon's secret visit to London on the night of the murder. They traced him to Charing Cross both on his arrival and departure. They saw the guard who had helped to carry him in his prostrate condition past the victims of the railway accident. Working both in London and at Saxton, putting this and that together with remarkable ability and celerity, they might, if there had been any attempt at flight, have arrested Gideon on

Friday morning. But there was no particular hurry, and some fresh evidence sought in London was not yet completed.

The two police officers were told off to watch the Castle and its elated proprietor. So well had they done their work that not a whisper of their true errand was heard in Saxton. A suspicion was beginning to grow in the local mind that they were agents on the look-out for bribery cases, though whether instructed by the Liberal candidate or the Conservative none could tell. This was a delusion they did not care to dispute, but rather encouraged.

Gideon, driven in his own brougham, with one stranger inside and another on the box, was already far on his way to London before a whiff of this new sensation reached Saxton. Saxton, indeed, already had as much as it could comfortably digest in the stories of the magnificent *fête* at the Castle, of the unequalled splendour of the company, of the distinguished

favour shown by the Lord-Lieutenant to the host, and of the certainty that, as far as the election was concerned, all was over now, except the shouting that would hail Gideon Fleyce member for Saxton.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DEPRESSION AT THE DOG AND DUCK.

THAT something serious had happened was borne in upon the servants at Castle Fleyce, as they stood at door or window, and saw their master drive away with this strange escort. Since the hand of the officer of the law had been laid upon his shoulder, and the word 'MURDER' had been spoken in his ear, Gideon had not said a word.

Mr. Pritchett, the officer from Scotland Yard, was conscious that his opportunities of making the business pleasing to the person chiefly concerned were exceedingly limited. Still he did his best. This was not one of those ordinary cases in which a man merely kicks

his wife to death, or slays a man in a drunken brawl. It was an affair of the highest society. His prisoner was one who, if not a member of Parliament, was a candidate for Parliamentary honours, and who, as Mr. Pritchett had respectfully observed with his own eyes, had that very day entertained the Lord-Lieutenant of the county.

That such a man should commit murder was by no means a marvel. Crime, Mr. Pritchett knew, was not a luxury confined to the lower classes. He had had one or two big cases before, but nothing nearly so good as this, and being a man of some sensibility, he entertained a feeling of personal obligation towards Gideon. He knew this would be the great event of the day, and that the conduct of 'that intelligent officer, Mr. Pritchett,' would live in the fierce light that beats upon a sensational case.

Therefore, it behoved him to treat Gideon with consideration, and nothing could exceed

the deference of his manner when he asked him if he would like any little thing put up for the journey. Gideon shook his head wearily, but said nothing. Therefore Mr. Pritchett took upon himself to request Mr. Parker to put up a change of linen for his master, who, he said, was going to town on particular business, and might be absent a day or two.

Mr. Parker did as he was bidden, though with a surly air. His master took no notice of him as he came and went, nor made any reply to his varied inquiries as to orders. Something was wrong, Mr. Parker shrewdly suspected, and the return of the carriage from the junction was uneasily awaited.

‘It’s murder, that’s what it is,’ said the coachman, who enjoyed his exceptional importance at being the only man who knew anything about it.

He was not to be wheedled into any further disclosures, a circumstance highly to his credit, as he really knew nothing more.

He had got this much out of his companion on the box.

It was, however, enough for the household, who felt the immediate necessity of sitting down and having a good meal. They ranged themselves in the dining-room where late had gathered Gideon's guests, and in corners of which there must surely yet have lingered echoes of Lord Bowbye's pleasant voice, and of Gideon's protestation that this was the proudest day of his life.

It is hard to say to what kind of master domestic servants of modern days would be faithful in adversity. But there is no difficulty in concluding that it would not be to one newly rich. Gideon paid his servants good wages, and they lived as they pleased, which was extravagantly. With the exception of Mr. Parker, whom he exceedingly disliked, he was not unreasonable in his demands for service, or unkind in his personal intercourse with those who rendered it.

Yet now, whilst he, suddenly snatched from near approach to the pinnacle of his desire, was, as their imagination fed by the 'Police News' pictured, manacled hand and foot, they gathered round his table, drank his choice wines, hacked his costly meat, smoked his cigars (though some would have preferred the humble pipe), and, later, when general hilarity prevailed, the women pelted the half-tipsy men with the flowers that decked the long glittering table.

Finally, they bundled the table on one side, and Thomas, the head footman, producing a flute, blew out entrancing music, to which they danced. Thomas was not true to time, and a little shaky as to tune. But amid the prevalent good humour these shortcomings were overlooked, and, as Mary the housekeeper put it, they 'kep' it up' till four o'clock in the morning.

It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and these worthy people were wise to make the best of Gideon's misfortune.

It was all over the town the next morning, falling like a thunderbolt from a clear sky. It was all very well for the servants up at the Castle to hold high revelry. Their wages for a month were safe, and in the meantime there were many pickings to be had out of the dislocated household. But it was different in Saxton, where the particular moment chosen for the falling of the thunderbolt was exceedingly inconvenient.

‘Ef it had only come a Tuesday,’ Round Tommy sighed, ‘it would ’a’ bin different.’

Possibly owing to his circular shape, Round Tommy was the centre of a circle of dolorous ‘Longshore men, who on the morning following the *fête*-day stood and gazed on the melancholy ocean. It could not be on any other ground that he acquired this distinction, for he was not given to lead conversation, nor used to hold groups of his fellow-men in rapt attention upon his words. But with a certain mathematical instinct the ‘Longshore men grouped them-

selves round Tommy as the spokes of a wheel are ranged round the axle.

No one had spoken much, for there is a sorrow too deep for words. The cloud that had fallen upon these amphibious labourers in the vineyard was the certainty that they would not get the three pounds, which had almost rested within the palm of their horny hands. Had the transaction been complete, all would have been well, for when a 'Longshore man's hand had closed over three golden sovereigns it did not open again, save to dispense the treasure in beer and tobacco.

But there was the rub. On this very night they were to have received their money; the persons who were to have dispensed it had been named; and every man knew where he was to go for his pay. Sunday, it had been tacitly arranged, they would devote to steadily drinking the money, and on Monday it would be their proud privilege to exercise that suffrage which the Constitution has conferred upon its sons.

Immediately after the fearful rumour ran through the town that Mr. Fleyce had been 'took up on a charge of wilful murder,' the 'Longshore men had with one accord and with quickened footsteps gone over to Mr. Tandy's to see how the land lay.

They found it lay right abeam, was buttressed about with jagged rocks, and that a gale of wind was blowing dead on to it. They would be shipwrecked as sure as they were standing there. Mr. Tandy had told them plainly he had no authority to pay any money on account of Mr. Fleyce, for whom he no longer acted as agent, and whose candidature he believed would be immediately withdrawn.

That was not the bitterest drop in the cup. They were quite certain of Gideon's three pounds, but many of them had so shrewdly worked the ropes that they had almost to a certainty secured three pounds from the other side, thus balancing any irregularity there might be in the transaction, and leaving them perfectly

untrammelled to vote for the man of their choice.

Now not only would they lose Gideon's three pounds, but also its problematical supplement from the other side.

This was conduct not to be borne in quietness by men of independent minds, and it would have gone hard with Gideon if he had passed the pier down by the shore and faced his whilom supporters. They had been humbugged and disgracefully defrauded. That Gideon might be hanged was the general aspiration, and many, ignorant of recent changes in the law, announced their intention of going to see him 'dance on nothing.'

In higher circles of society the feeling of resentment against the wretched man, though less coarsely expressed, was not less vindictive. Mr. Goldfinch from his elevated desk did not disguise his early conviction, now assured beyond chance of contradiction, that Gideon was 'a bad lot.' He had seen a good many elections in his

time, but never one conducted on the principles adopted by 'that man.'

Mr. Firminger had all along suspected Gideon; the reticence he had hitherto observed being the more commendable in a gentleman accustomed to come down sharp upon the block.

Mr. Burnap said nothing, but spent an hour in going through his accounts. They showed a balance of between 70*l.* and 80*l.* still owing by the proprietor of Castle Fleyce. The general account might be said to balance this, though Mr. Burnap took a melancholy pleasure in making out his bill.

The news affected Mr. Griggs in a way that may seem peculiar, but was familiar enough in his household. As Mrs. Griggs said, 'everything went to his nose, whether burial or christening.' In less metaphorical language, the truth may be stated that, whenever quickened by emotion, whether of joy or sorrow, Mr. Griggs immediately developed an aggravation of

the perpetual cold in his head. Now, having taken in a stock of pocket-handkerchiefs, he went snuffling up and down High Street, bewailing the common calamity and his own share in it.

Mr. Griggs was known to be pretty well-to-do, and it was well understood that he had turned over several hundred pounds in his business connections with Gideon. This had led to sundry visits, ostensibly casual, but really evilly designed on the part of the vicar and other persons accustomed to hunt up charitable subscriptions. As well as the cold in his head would permit, Mr. Griggs now made it clear that he had lost a good deal of money by Gideon, and how he was to get through the next year was more than he could tell.

As for the other side, they at first suspected a trap. But as the news came down from London that Fleyce had really been up at Bow Street, amazement melted into delight. Of course, having been nominated, Gideon's name

would be submitted to the ballot-box ; but they knew Saxton well enough to feel assured that he would not have any dangerous following.

Mr. Montgomery, who had taken the work of the election a good deal into his own hands since roused by the spectacle of Gideon's triumphant advance, knew exactly how things stood in respect to payment. Whether he got in by eighty votes or eight hundred was a matter of small moment to him, so that he were member for Saxton. No money had been paid by Gideon, and he now determined none should be paid by him.

He was certain to poll enough to carry him through, and in addition to saving the money, no inconsiderable matter, he would have the advantage of being free from possible charges of bribery.

Accordingly, when Mr. Muffleton, in fulfilling an engagement made two days previously, appeared at the Hall to take final instructions as to the channel by which a large sum of gold

was to reach him at six o'clock, Mr. Montgomery met his inquiries with an angry stare.

‘Is it really possible, Mr. Muffleton, that after our long connection you can suppose I would be a party to any such transaction as you hint at! I cannot understand your meaning, and I beg you will not misunderstand mine. I paid no money to gain my family seat at the last election, and I will pay none now.’

‘That is quite true, sir, at last election,’ Mr. Muffleton said, with puzzled hesitation, ‘but there was no opposition then.’

‘That, I will beg you to believe, has nothing to do with the question. Then, as now, purity of election is a principle for which I should always contend and by which I shall certainly stand. If there have been promises of anything otherwise given in my name I have known nothing about it, and I request you will let my real views be known.’

‘But, sir ——’ said Mr. Muffleton trembling at the prospect of a hundred angry ‘Long-shore men and an indefinite number of other honest tradesmen to whom he had by nods and winks, squeezes of the hands, and numerous digs in the ribs promised little sums of money.

‘There, that will do, Mr. Muffleton. The matter is not one to be discussed. I beg you will make known my views, if, as indeed I am sorry to think is the case, it be necessary that any distinct statement should be made there-upon.’

Mr. Muffleton went home a stricken man, judiciously took to his bed, and did not appear in public till the election was over.

But Saxton knew, or instinctively guessed, how things would be up at the Hall now that they were thus at the Castle, and a feeling of profound depression reigned alike in the cosy smoke-room at the Blue Lion and by the sanded floor of the Dog and Duck, where erstwhile

Mr. Dumfy, now dead and gone, had been wont to lord it in the reflected light of Gideon's glory.

It was very miserable for everybody, and there was general agreement in the Dog and Duck in the observation wrung from Round Tommy, after paying out of his own pocket for his fifth pint, 'Them as is out of it is best off.'

If Mr. Dumfy, to whom reference was here plainly made, had lived, what would he have thought of his employer? Doubtless the events of the last few days would have confirmed his natural inclination to work apart from Gideon, and he would have felt it due to the position of a deacon at the church at Rehoboth immediately and publicly to wash his hands of all connection with the guilty man.

But as Round Tommy said, Mr. Dumfy was out of it. All that could be found of him had been laid in the long trench where were buried the remains of the victims of the railway

disaster, and Mrs. Dumfy was making her moan in the little house in Camden Town, the grim and shining spotlessness of which seemed to make grief colder and sorrow harder to bear.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE ELECTION.

O'BRIEN heard of the tragedy at Castle Fleyce within an hour after the thunderbolt fell. Gideon, awaking out of his stupor when he reached the railway station, and realising, as it seemed for the first time, that he was actually on his way to London in the custody of two police officers, scribbled a few lines to O'Brien, and despatched them by the coachman. They did not come to much, and would have left O'Brien in bewildered doubt, but for the supplementary information of the coachman.

‘Dear O'Brien,’ the note ran, ‘they are taking me to London on a charge. For God’s sake come down.—Yours, G. Fleece.’

It was curious that in this hurried scrawl Gideon seemed to shrink from even mentioning the charge on which he had been arrested. Moreover, there was an absence of information in other parts of the note that might have defeated its purpose. Who 'they' were and where precisely 'down' was were points as shadowy as the charge.

But the faithful coachman had some slight information, and was able to piece together bits of conjecture that made the narrative sufficient for O'Brien to follow up the trail, and he was at Bow Street by the train following that by which Gideon had travelled.

He was shocked to hear of the death of the Spider, and indignant at the charge against Gideon. Gideon did not stand in his highest favour, but to hold him guilty of murder, the victim being his own father, were lower depths of vice than, according to his estimation, Gideon's nature could plumb.

He was staggered by the evidence given

before the magistrate which, even at this preliminary stage, seemed to forge link by link a chain that bound Gideon fast to the dead body that had filled with its silent presence the darkened room of the bijou residence at Fulham.

O'Brien knew perhaps better than any one else the precise relations of Gideon with his father. He knew how incensed the old man was with his son. He learned now for the first time of Gideon's pecuniary embarrassment, and as the story was pieced together, in none the less convincing way because some witnesses were unwilling to do harm to the man who stood in the dock with drooping figure and whitened face, his faith was subject to cruel shocks.

Gideon's secret departure from Saxton ; his visit to his father, which the prisoner did not deny ; his midnight return ; the desperate attempt to evade recognition by Mr. Tandy, and the proof of guilt in other ways disclosed by his attempt

to raise money by fraudulent representations, all went to make up a story it would be exceedingly difficult to pull to pieces.

O'Brien could not do much in London pending the trial, for which Gideon now stood fully committed ; but he went down to Saxton, and acted there with an amount of energy that surprised some people. He bundled Mr. Parker and the rest of the servants off the premises with a month's wages in their hands, and the effective hint that he knew more of their goings on than met the eye. There was at first some disposition to stand out for a month's board wages, but on consideration this was abandoned, and the servants straightway departed.

O'Brien put everything under lock and key, sealing them with the family seal of the O'Briens, who had once been kings in Ireland.

In carrying out the raid amongst the servants he had made an exception in favour of the gardener, a decent Saxton man, whose

wife lived down in the town. He installed man and wife in the Castle, pulled down the blinds, and left it in its solitary grandeur, a type of the wreck of Gideon's fortunes.

The election had taken place in due time, and, as every one will remember, the result formed not the least remarkable episode in the surprising political crisis of 1880. Mr. Montgomery was returned by a majority of 200, but his poll was only 236.

The 'Longshore men had at first stood angrily aloof from an election conducted on such principles. Still there was good reason to believe, though this is a secret very properly locked in the ballot-box, that the 36 who voted for Gideon were 'Longshore men, mindful of former bounties, and wrathful with the man who had so meanly taken advantage of circumstances to defraud them.

It is even thought that if the election had taken place a day or two later Gideon might have been elected. It was only Monday after-

noon that the 'Longshore men, gloomily discussing matters at the Dog and Duck, had it suddenly borne in upon them that there was a way by which they might pay off 'that old Montgomery.' In the first flush of honest indignation, when on Saturday night they realised the fact that they would get nothing from either candidate, they resolved that they would stand on one side and not soil their hands with an election carried on as this was.

This view was largely adopted by other electors, and it was only the better class of tradesmen, like Mr. Griggs, Mr. Burnap, Mr. Goldfinch, and Mr. Firminger, who had determined, now that Mr. Montgomery was certain to get in (and especially as they had been so grossly deceived as to the moral character of Gideon), to cast their votes for their old representative and neighbour. These and a few personal friends made up the total of 236 which formed the majority, and it is pleasing

to know that there were so many good men in the town.

The 'Longshore men, and others who felt the bitterness of their lot, could easily have swamped this handful of true men, and triumphantly carried Gideon's election if they had only thought of it a little sooner. But, their cooler judgment obscured by indignation, this view of the situation did not cross their minds till three o'clock had rung out from the old church tower.

At that hour not a single vote had been polled for Gideon. All the ready money he had poured into the town; all the liquor with which he had swilled the streets; all the well-paid labour he had found for bread-winners, had gone for nothing.

Saxton was a highly moral town, and none in it were inclined to give their vote for a man who had not only murdered his father but had omitted to pay free and independent electors the stipulated 3*l.* each for their votes.

It was Round Tommy upon whom had first flashed the thought of the splendid revenge that was open to them. All day long Tommy had felt a certain indistinct and unaccustomed feeling in his head, 'buzzing about like a honey bee,' as he subsequently described it in the frequent narrations with which he attempted to fix the remarkable phenomenon on the memory of his contemporaries.

At first he naturally enough thought it was the effect of the previous night's boose.

'It was, and it wasn't,' to quote from the authentic narrative. 'I were a bit headachy and heavy about the eyes like, and didn't care to work.'

That, of course, looked like the drop of beer the night afore.

'But,' he continued, 'I was abothered by somethin' as seemed a coming into my yed and then went out.'

At last it came and stayed, and Round Tommy explained to the quickening intelli-

gence of the company at the Dog and Duck how they might do a great stroke of business. Let them go and vote in a batch for Gideon. That would pay off that Skinflint Montgomery. Then what would follow?

‘Why, this yere Fleyce would be hung, there would be another vacancy, and consequently another election, and it would be their game to see as they got down a right sort of person, who would go it as Gideon had done, at first, but who wouldn’t wind up by murdering his father.’

Or, at least, would not be so far lost to all sense of what was due to the electors as to be found out before he had paid the vote money.

Considering how much time and labour the incubation of this thought had cost Round Tommy, it was surprising how quickly it was taken up by the company at the Dog and Duck. They saw it in a moment, and, only waiting to drink another pint, dispersed in search of their fellow-electors.

Round Tommy himself, as being the most patriarchal and respectable member of the society, undertook to call upon Mr. Tandy, and 'put him in 'art a bit,' as he said. But as soon as Round Tommy, with many mysterious winks and shrugs, and some futile attempts to dig Mr. Tandy in the ribs, had explained his errand, he found himself standing outside the office with the door shut in his face. How he got out he declared he never knew.

'P'raps you was rowled, Tommy,' said Bill Sharp, the wit of the company at the Dog and Duck. 'P'raps you was rowled out like a 'ogsed.'

But the time was not well chosen for joking. Other emissaries had been scarcely more fortunate than Round Tommy. They had got together a man here and there, but without organisation and with something less than forty minutes to spare, thirty-six was the total they could bring to the poll, and Mr. Montgomery was declared duly elected.

CHAPTER XL.

IN THE DOCK.

THE days went their ordinary course outside the little plot of earth bounded by the grey walls of Newgate. The sun rose and set. It was fine weather or it rained. It was warm for the season or was cold. People were born, married, and died. People that Gideon knew very well got up half an hour earlier or later in the morning as they pleased, breakfasted according to their taste, went out for a walk or a drive in the Park, or made calls, or read or wrote, as fancy seized them. They ordered their own dinners, or dined with a friend, and from the bountiful list of things to eat and drink made their selection.

Inside these few roods of land, this mere speck in the heart of the City of London, life was lived under quite other conditions. Gideon had to get up when he was called, and was sent to bed whether he was sleepy or not. He might leave the prison fare supplied to him, but that was the only choice he had in the matter of his meals.

He was no longer a man, and scarcely a machine, though his legs carried him hither and thither as he moved within the circumscribed area allotted to him, and his blood ran its due course through his veins. For him, his sole connection with the world was that he—

Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks and stones and trees.

It was a swift and sudden change from the life he had led, it seemed but yesterday. The fall had dazed him, as if he had literally tumbled from some height and been stunned. He was like him whom he had once fondly regarded as his prototype in other respects than

that indicated by the autocratic declaration with respect to the Alps. He was a 'man of destiny,' and had his 'star.' So lately it had flamed high in the heavens, paling the light of neighbouring constellations. Suddenly and swiftly it had gone out, falling into abysmal darkness.

It was no use crying after a fallen star, and all Gideon hoped or looked for now was that he might quickly tumble after it and be no more seen. The mood that had come upon him on that memorable Sunday night when walking home from Coldharbour Junction returned to him with increased force, and took full possession of his mind.

Mr. Tandy had been to see him once. O'Brien had visited him several times. He felt some flash of light return to him at the sight of O'Brien, but when he was gone darkness fell again.

He didn't particularly like being hung, and if he had had his choice would have gone out of life in some other way. But this also was

being settled for him, and he acquiesced. He knew that all was lost, even honour. This last was not a commodity he had jealously guarded. The kind of honour he had sought was that which one man pays to another by outward and visible sign of doffing cap or clapping hands. He had enjoyed a great deal of this within the last twelve months.

But it was all over now. He had tumbled in the gutter, and the crowd had left him or remained only to jeer.

He would not talk much with O'Brien on the charge against him, impatiently dismissing the theme when his visitor brought it forward with intent to assist in the defence.

‘It’s no matter,’ he said, pettishly. ‘They’ve got up a wonderful case against me, and I don’t see where it’s going to break down.’

He had asked how the election had gone at Saxton, and had been told of his poll of 36. He had heard that the mortgagees had foreclosed, and that if he stepped out of prison

a free man he would not have a penny—a condition of life he did not care to face.

Once, after a long silence, he had asked what Napper said about it.

‘She believes you are as innocent as I am,’ O’Brien said. ‘She’s a splendid girl, and is quite confident you will get off.’

Gideon didn’t say anything, but when his visitor had gone he threw himself on his pallet and sobbed bitterly. It seemed to him, now that everything else had gone, there was left for his sole possession a barren, hopeless love of Napper. It had probably been growing a long time and had silently spread its roots in his mind and heart, while he was serenely thinking that when he had won his seat in Parliament and furnished his house in town, then he would come to the attorney’s daughter and tell her that all these things were hers.

He had been so certain of her answer that he had scarcely concerned himself with the silent irresistible growth of this quite new and

usually unprofitable sense of love. To him his affection for Napper was like an investment in consols. The capital and interest were quite safe, and there was no need to keep it always in mind as he would have done had the security been more risky.

But the Bank of England had broken. The State was suddenly merged in bankruptcy, and the return he had looked for with a certainty that had the effect of diminishing its apparent value was absolutely and irretrievably lost.

Now he knew how deep this love had grown, how much a part of his life had become this thought of a day, when he should have Napper always with him, and how she would grace his life with the abounding beauty and purity of her own.

He felt he really could be a good and honest man with her to guide and counsel him. By-and-bye this would have come to pass. When he had made his position, and

had nothing more to gain by those methods of progression favoured by the family through many generations, it would be easy to be good and honest, not only in act but in thought.

‘To-morrow’ he would close his account with all kinds of meanness and pettiness, and would lift up his head into that purer atmosphere that Napper breathed, and which had for him a power of attraction that proved he was not wholly bad.

To-morrow had come, and it found him in Newgate. Several morrows dawned. How many he did not know. He was tired of life, and kept no count of time.

One day he stood in the dock.

He knew that a hundred pairs of eyes were greedily fixed upon him. The voice of the crowd filled his ears, and sometimes when, during the adjournment, the windows were opened to air the court, he heard, as he passed down the steps, the murmur of the multitude outside who came day by day in vain endeavour

to get into the court, and, failing that, stared hour after hour at the dull, grey walls, and caught eagerly at such gleams of information as the telegraph boys, running out of the court with messages for the evening papers, were able to convey.

Gideon had a strange sensation that he was a spectator at the scene, and that it was some one else who was being tried for his life. He seemed to see things as through an eyelet hole in a raree-show, such as he had looked upon years ago when he was a child—or was it in this life at all, not in some previous stage of existence? He called to mind the condition of absorbing interest which, with his face pressed eagerly against the framework of the show, he had beheld some moving scene. He did not remember what it was meant to represent, only there came back to him the sense then noted of mysterious silence about the motion of the figures, and the idea that they were a long way off, out of the range of sound.

It was with some curious assimilation of this idea that, perched high up in the dock, he looked down on the place beneath where counsel strove for Somebody's body, as he instinctively felt.

Presently he began to get thoroughly interested in the case, which, as the trial went on, and the evidence lengthened out, he felt was pressing very hard upon the prisoner. He listened with breathless interest to the speech of the counsel for the prosecution, and when he sat down beseeching the jury—hypocritically, as Gideon thought—if they had any doubt to bestow the benefit of it upon the prisoner, he found himself thanking Heaven he was not in the prisoner's place.

Such a web had this man in wig and gown wound round the accused, tying it tighter and tighter, till it seemed to deliver him bound into the hands of the hangman with all the preliminary ceremony of ligature accomplished.

Gideon was thinking over this terrible

indictment when he awoke with a start at the sound of a familiar voice. He was back in Castle Fleyce, and instinctively began to scowl as he thought he saw that confounded fellow prowling around for orders.

He looked up, and there in the witness-box was Mr. Parker, most respectable of butlers, with a look on his face which plainly said to all who might regard him (and some of those swell people on the bench might be in want of a handy and well-recommended man out of livery)—

‘It was the greatest pain to me to come forward and give evidence against this poor misguided man. He was not a gentleman, I know. I always felt some little degradation in his service: but he was rich, paid well and regular, and there was perquisites. If I could save him I would, as indeed I always feel it my dooty to do my best for my employer: but public dooty before everything. I will tell the truth, though the shelves in the pantry fall.’

This may or may not have been the precise current of Mr. Parker's cogitations during the brief moments he stood with eyes drooping while the crier was looking up the Testament on which he was to be sworn.

His narrative was a much more simple thing. He told how on the day the murder was believed to have been committed his master had come home from church in a moody and perturbed state of mind ; how he had sent his food away untouched ; how he had ordered his supper to be laid in the library ; and what precise instructions he had given that he was not to be disturbed.

Mr. Parker had seen him in the library half an hour later with cheek resting on his hand, 'looking orful,' Mr. Parker added, with a slight shudder, as if the reminiscence was too much for him.

An hour later Mr. Parker had looked again, and the chair was empty. He had gone about softly, listening, but there was no sound. He

had waited another hour, had timidly knocked, and receiving no response, had gently turned the handle and peeped in. The place was empty, the food untouched, and the fire going out.

Mr. Parker had stirred the fire and replenished it. He knew his master had not gone out by any of the doors, and indeed found traces of his departure by the window.

At first it had occurred to Mr. Parker to fasten the window, but he remembered his strict injunctions were not to enter the room at all, and if things were all right it would be awkward for him to have bolted his master out. So he left things as they were, and sitting up, praiseworthily in the public interest, had seen his master creep in by the window, and found him in bed the next morning, as reported.

‘And did you shut the library door, Mr. Parker, after having taken in the fowl and claret, and left your master there?’ demanded Mr. Phillipine Brown, the eminent counsel whom O’Brien had engaged for the defence.

Mr. Parker was quite delighted to converse with so pleasant-spoken a gentleman. Just the man he would like to serve. Perhaps he had a vacancy, or might even make one for a butler of prepossessing appearance, long experience, and recommended by some high families.

‘Yes sir,’ said Mr. Parker, deferentially, returning the counsel’s pleasant smile and flicking off an imaginary crumb from the desk before him.

‘And I suppose it was kept closed till you opened it in the manner you have already so clearly described?’

‘Quite so, sir,’ said Mr. Parker, nodding his absolute approval of this suggestion.

‘Then, sir,’ said Mr. Phillipine Brown, dropping his voice to sterner tones, and leaning forward to fix the witness with his terrible eye, ‘how did you in the meanwhile manage to see your master sitting in the arm-chair by the fire in the library with this expression on his face, which you have described as “orful”?’

‘Why, sir, I saw him quite plain.’

‘You saw him quite plain, and how could you see him? Can you see through an oak door? Don’t trifle with the jury.’

‘I was stooping down, and—and——’

‘Oh! you were stooping down, and—and—there was a keyhole, perhaps?’

‘Yes, sir,’ said Mr. Parker, feeling that his chances of a comfortable situation were entirely gone.

‘And, I suppose,’ Mr. Phillipine Brown thundered, ‘that after spying upon your master through the keyhole, you prowled about for the rest of the night, imagining all kinds of evil things, and expecting nothing less than to see him bring home a dead body in a sack, and bury it under the hearthstone.’

‘Yes, sir.’

Mr. Parker was trembling so that, as he subsequently confided to the cook, ‘you could have knocked him down with a napkin.’ Had he been pressed he would, at the moment, have

admitted that he had himself committed the murder the jury were sworn to investigate.

‘You may go, sir,’ said Mr. Phillipine Brown, in tones of infinite contempt, casting upon the unhappy man a withering glance that completed his abasement.

Mr. Parker was gladly disappearing when Mr Brown, suddenly rising and beckoning him back with an imperious, ‘Stay a moment, sir!’ said—

‘When you were peering about the key-hole did you chance to notice what kind of a coat your master was wearing?’

‘Yes, sir, a black coat, sir.’

‘Very well, sir, you know the coat?’ Mr. Phillipine Brown continued, assuming something of his blander tone.

‘No, I can’t say I do,’ Mr. Parker feebly answered.

He was getting off a few minutes ago, and none could say where rash confession of knowledge might lead him.

‘Did you see it the next morning?’

‘I didn’t look.’

‘Oh, being in the room you didn’t look, your favourite mode of observation being through the keyhole? Well now, you say you saw your master return home in the morning. Had he then the same coat on that he wore when you observed him through the keyhole?’

‘I don’t know, sir.’

‘You don’t know?’ thundered Mr. Phillipine Brown. ‘Mind what you are at, sir. Remember you are on your oath. Now listen to me. Before your master went out you saw him through the keyhole sitting in the library and wearing a coat that may have been black or may not?’

‘He says it was black,’ interposed Mr. Landpole, the counsel for the Crown.

‘—Which may have been black,’ continued Mr. Phillipine Brown, without noticing the interruption; ‘and you saw him return in the

early morning. Now what do you mean by saying you don't know what kind of a coat he then wore?'

'Because, sir,' answered Parker, 'he had on an overcoat.'

'Very well, he wore an overcoat. Now you may go, as possibly you have some appointment at a keyhole.'

After Mr. Parker came the stationmaster at Coldharbour Junction, who proved the sale to Gideon of a return ticket to London on this particular night. He was not able to speak of his return, but there were forthcoming the guard who had helped to conduct him from carriage to carriage over the scene of the accident on the main line, and the porter at the junction who had asked Gideon whether he should get him a carriage, and had been roughly answered in the negative.

That no link should be wanting in the chain, there was also forthcoming the cabman who drove him to the bijou residence at

Fulham, and who had noticed that as he left the cab he carried a stick.

The finding of the stick was described by an intelligent police-officer, and it being produced in court was gazed upon with intense interest by the crowded audience.

Mr. Phillipine Brown was up again smiling genially upon the police-officer who had first entered the room where the Spider sat weaving webs no more.

‘There was no mark on the stick, I think you said—no stain or mark of a struggle?’

‘No, sir.’

‘It was exactly as if a gentleman calling had placed his stick in the corner of the room and gone away and forgotten it?’

‘Just so, sir.’

‘Now, about this safe. You say it was open?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘And nothing in it touched?’

‘As far as I know there was nothing touched. It looked perfectly in order.’

‘You say you found in the right hand of the deceased a piece of cloth, which you produce?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘What colour should you call that?’ said Mr. Brown, pointing to the fragment which was handed to the witness, having been already put in evidence. ‘What did it look like when you saw it first?’

‘It was very dirty, sir, and we had some trouble to get it out of the hand of the old gentleman. That’s what makes it tore a bit in the shreds. It’s hard to say what it is now, being too dirty; but I should say it was black cloth.’

‘Good cloth should you say, such as a gentleman would have his coat made of?’

‘Well, I’m no judge of that, sir, but I should say it was.’

The silent witness was handed to the jury, who curiously examined it. It was evidently the lappel of a coat wrenched off by a sudden

jerk, but so discoloured by the grime of the old gentleman's hand and the accumulated dust it had received, and so crushed and torn, that it was difficult to make out anything useful with respect to it. Still there was little doubt that it had originally been black.

‘Now you’ve had some experience with struggling men, I suppose, Mr. Potts,’ said Mr. Phillipine Brown, cheerily. ‘You’ve had a man by the coat collar occasionally. Does it strike you as being a probable thing that a well-made coat such as the prisoner would wear would tear off in this way in whatever desperate struggle?’

‘It might and it might not,’ Mr. Potts answered cautiously, remembering his oath. ‘It might be an old coat, and then it would come away.’

‘Exactly, but you don’t suppose Mr. Gideon Fleyce would go about with a coat in the rotten condition you describe?’

‘The witness didn’t say anything about

rottenness,' said Mr. Landpole, 'and besides his opinion on this matter is not evidence.'

The Judge ruled against Mr. Phillipine Brown, which was a matter of small moment to him. He knew very well what was evidence and what was not. But he felt he had gained his point in impregnating the mind of the jury with the opinion that a gentleman of the irreproachable dress of Mr. Gideon Fleyce was not likely to go about in a coat from which you might pluck pieces as if it were cotton wool.

Unhappily for Mr. Phillipine Brown, the prosecution had in reserve evidence on this point which it was difficult to get over. A diligent search had been made in Gideon's wardrobes without bringing to light any garment with a piece snatched out from the front. Of this failure Mr. Phillipine Brown had made good use.

It was met in re-examination by the suggestion that Gideon after his return had had plenty of time to destroy this damning evidence.

Indeed, he need not have waited to get home, and might have disposed of the coat anywhere between the bijou residence at Fulham and the lordly Castle at Saxton.

Mr. Phillipine Brown had inadvertently erred in bringing out the fact that when Gideon returned home he was wearing an overcoat. He had seen this in a moment, and immediately dropped the subject. But it was also seen by the other side, and Mr. Landpole, when he came to address the jury, boldly advanced the theory that Gideon, trusting to his overcoat, had made away with the torn morning coat somewhere between London and Saxton.

The strong point the prosecution made on this incident was the production of a waistcoat found in Gideon's wardrobe. Experts were placed in the box with the waistcoat and the fragment of the coat before them, who proved, in a manner beyond the power of Mr. Phillipine Brown to shake, that the stuff was the same.

This was felt by the crowded court to settle the case. After it the evidence of Mr. Tandy, which had formed a principal feature in the examination before the magistrate, paled in interest. Nevertheless, it all went to swell the growing tide of demonstration which connected the prisoner in the dock with the ghostly figure seated in the chair in the bijou residence, holding in his hand a piece of the coat of the man who slew him.

Mr. Tandy was evidently an unwilling witness, which made all the more weighty the description dragged out of him by Mr. Landpole of Gideon's attempt to evade his notice when he met him on the Sunday night; of his strategic movement across the field; of his anger when detected by the dog, and of his refusal to accept Mr. Tandy's company for the rest of the journey home.

Mr. Tandy further gave evidence of Gideon's visit to him, and of the negotiation for a loan.

Other witnesses were forthcoming to show that Gideon's estate was already mortgaged to the full extent, and that his representations to Mr. Tandy were fraudulent.

These testified to his financial position, and supplied material for the telling passage in the speech of Mr. Landpole, where he described Gideon as 'in desperate straits for money, clutching at the prize his ambition had urged him to reach after, making an appeal to his father to help him, and when that was refused raising a murderous hand to strike him.'

Mr. Landpole would not even give the prisoner the benefit of the supposition that the act was unpremeditated. It was, he insisted, planned to the slightest detail, even to the fowl and claret he was to enjoy in the solitude of the library after he had done the murder.

Mr. Landpole made a good deal of the fowl and claret, and, it being then half past one, the thought suggested luncheon to the judge, and at this point an adjournment took place.

Gideon was led away, the audience keeping their seats, sipping their sherry and eating their sandwiches. To the latter the speech of Mr. Landpole had added a condiment which, had they only known what was coming, might have saved them the trouble of using mustard or salt.

It was certain the prisoner would be convicted, and there would be none of that really distressing doubt which sometimes attends occasions of this kind, and modifies the satisfaction with which the shadow of the gallows has invested them.

When Mr. Landpole came back, wiping his lips, to resume his address, the cords were tighter drawn, and the more imaginative among the audience fancied they saw the judge putting out his hand to feel if the black cap was within reach.

The cross-examination by Mr. Phillipine Brown and the evidence he brought forward all bore upon the absence of motive. If Gideon

had done this thing what was the prize he had claimed for himself? There was the gold untouched, all the securities tallied with the list found in a small book in the old gentleman's handwriting. Why should he have done this thing?

Mr. Landpole was ready with the reason why. Inquiries made had failed to bring to light any will made by the old gentleman. In the event of his dying intestate Gideon would of course come in for the whole of the property. That seemed to Mr. Landpole reason enough; and so it seemed to the jury and to the crowd in the court.

Gideon listening attentively to the speech with a strange feeling of interest in some unfortunate around whom the toils were being drawn, raised his hand at this passage and looked as if he were going to speak. He took a sheet of paper, one of several which lay untouched before him, and seemed as if he were about to break through his habitude of

taciturnity and make some communication to his counsel.

After a moment he threw down the pencil and resumed his earlier attitude of passive indifference, now and then varied by a flash of interest as he listened to the counsel discussing the case of some poor man whom he seemed to know.

It was a tough uphill task Mr. Phillipine Brown had undertaken. But he liked uphill tasks. They had made his fortune in earlier days, and now kept it at high-water mark.

He was quite ready with explanation of the whole affair. Nothing was more simple or more natural than that the prisoner had on this night visited his father. It was quite possible he had done so with the object of asking for a temporary loan.

On that point Mr. Phillipine Brown was not quite certain, and he had, he might mention, received singularly little assistance from the prisoner, who, proud with the consciousness

of his own innocence, persistently refused to consult with the solicitor, 'determined,' said Mr. Phillipine Brown, with a side look at the prisoner, and half apprehensive that he might get up and disclaim all knowledge of the heroic determination, 'resolved, from the moment he saw the jury in the box, that to a body of men so keenly intelligent and so sternly upright he would leave the case, confident of a triumphant acquittal.'

Mr. Brown would not say that was a desirable course to take, or one worthy of imitation. But he could not withhold admiration for a man who could, in such circumstances, coolly and boldly adopt it.

But to return to the events of this memorable Sunday night.

The prisoner had undoubtedly called to see his father, he had his interview and had quitted the house probably in some access of passion or indignation, seeing that he had left behind him the stick without which it was probable no

suspicion would have been attracted towards him.

What had taken place after he had left—probably at the time when far away on his journey home? It was impossible to believe that the situation of the unfortunate deceased and the opportunities it supplied for crime were not known in quarters where they might be peculiarly interesting. The house had been entered by some means at a later hour. There had evidently been two men, perhaps three, engaged. Possibly one went in and entered the room, and the others remained in ambush outside. There was a parley with the old man, a struggle, an attempted robbery, an accomplished murder.

‘What was the meaning?’ Mr. Phillipine Brown asked, lowering his tone to a solemn whisper, and fixing the foreman with his flaming eye, ‘what was the meaning of this key in the lock, distorted as they had seen it in the court? Who had done that? The prisoner

at the bar? Why? Did he not know how the key might be used?’

What had really happened was quite clear to the mind of Mr. Phillipine Brown. The old man had received his death-blow as he sat in the chair; had clutched at the murderer who, wrenching himself away, had left a piece of his coat in the death-grasp. The bloody work accomplished, the accomplices had gathered in the room to discuss the booty. There had been, as often happened in these cases, a quarrel. One attempting to open the safe had been set upon by the others. A struggle had followed, and, fearful that the noise had attracted attention outside, they had fled, leaving the safe untouched.

This, Mr. Phillipine Brown admitted, was a theory; but so was the case for the prosecution. One was, he submitted, as good as another, whilst his, he pleaded with outstretched hands, with a tremor in his voice and a tear in his eye, should make the other

kick the beam, since it was weighted with the precious burden of a human life.

‘Ingenious, but not a leg to stand upon,’ was the verdict of the gowned and wigged jury outside the box where the twelve men sat apart, borne down by their grave responsibility.

Whatever the men in the box might say, the jury outside, whether in wig or bonnet, stuff gown or black coat, had made up their minds to the verdict.

CHAPTER XLI.

OUT OF THE DOCK.

THESE things had filled up several days; but one day was like another to Gideon, and it seemed all within the illimitable twenty-four hours when he became conscious of a hush, heard the low voice of the judge and knew that he was summing up the evidence. Strange to say, he had never looked at him before nor asked his name. A sudden thought flashed through his mind, and his memory went back to a day—it seemed two or three centuries ago—when O'Brien had given the club dinner, and he had listened to the genial voice of the new judge as he discussed his colleagues on the Bench.

He looked up and saw that the man into

whose hands his life had now been delivered was Mr. Justice Dawkins. He had seen him riding in the Row and knew him again, though his face seemed smaller, girt about by the great grey wig.

It was growing late in the afternoon, and the dim light of the fading day fell upon the grey walls, he could see through the barred windows. Why should the windows be thus jealously guarded? he thought to himself. There was no hope of any hapless prisoner scrambling through, and surely no one outside would want to get in.

The reflectors facing the window caught whatever light there was, and flung it down upon the blue-cloth-covered desk at which counsel had stood and fought for his body. The leaders had gone now. They had done their task and earned their fees. They could afford to wait until the evening papers came out to learn the fate of the man whose cause had engrossed so much of their time. Moments

were guineas to them, and, having finished their work, they passed out of the heated court.

Gideon felt that, with the exception of the judge, he was the only person in the court who had room to sit without being uncomfortably crowded. The dock, at least, was roomy enough, and the policemen who sat on either side of him had no need to press upon him. Also, there was room enough for the elderly, pleasant-looking man who sat in a sort of pulpit at one end of the dock, and who was placidly turning over a book which might have contained a week's household account, but was probably a record of the day's doings in the gaol.

When Gideon turned his back to the crowded court to face the jury, this pleasant-looking old gentleman was right in front, and had for him a strange fascination. He was like a deacon or a churchwarden, or any responsible person of eminently respectable

appearance. That, almost within arm's reach of him, there was a human creature on trial for his life, whose fate would be settled within an hour or two, was a matter that seemed emphatically of no account to him. That his column of figures should add up right, and that his entries were made without a blot, was to him at the moment the matter of supremest interest.

Gideon, going back to the frame of mind in which he had been steeped till momentarily awakened by the discovery that Justice Dawkins was trying him, was much struck with this stony indifference on the part of the officials. They had their work to do, and it must be handed in at given periods whether the prisoner in the dock went free or was handed over to the executioner.

There was another gentleman, this one in a wig, who sat under the judge, and was busy writing all through the trial. He pored over his papers as if he were in his own office, and

the principal transaction of the day were the sale of a few hundred bales of cotton.

In the body of the court the interest was keen enough, and Gideon gathered some vague consciousness of the existence of a throng that from early morn till night waited outside the court for some chance that might gain them admission.

If the leaders engaged in the case did not feel it sufficiently interesting to await the end, it was otherwise with many scores of their junior brethren. These, looking wondrous wise in wig and gown, filled every seat usually allotted to them, and overflowed into the gangways, filching a seat, whenever it was possible, from the outside public. They watched the case with unflagging interest, discussing its bearings in voice loud enough for Gideon to know their opinion, the while they stared at him in the dock as if they were engaged to produce his portrait and were not permitted to take notes in court.

Just opposite Gideon, close by the seat at the moment vacant, where the gilt sword of justice hung, was a portly gentleman in a bluish gown, and wearing a gold chain. He was some City dignitary, and made the most of his opportunity of securing a good seat whence he might look on at the great drama of which all men spoke. Gideon noticed the alacrity with which he disappeared at luncheon time, the tardiness of his return, and the regularity with which he slept half an hour every afternoon by way of complement of his luncheon and preparation for his dinner.

Gideon had thought that from his place he could survey the full limits of the court and see all the faces that crowded it. But when irritated beyond measure by the loud tick of the clock behind, he turned to look at it, he beheld more faces in the balconies that bulged out from the back of the dock, and were filled with men and women leaning over and

greedily staring at him, counting the hairs of his head, it seemed.

This was worse than all. He had learned to face the cruel eyes that fed upon him with hungry curiosity from all parts of the court in front of the dock. But to know that always behind him were these two crowded balconies, with people staring right down upon his head, added a fresh sting to the bitterness of his daily death.

The voice of the judge delivering the charge had by its monotonous flow put the sheriff-and-alderman on the judgment-seat asleep for the second time. He had had his after-luncheon nap, and had waked up; but now he was off again, and Gideon could scarcely wonder. With his right hand resting on the red volume in which he had taken the notes, and with his face turned towards the jury, the judge went on resistlessly through the mass of evidence. He spoke with a low voice and with slow intonation. As it went on it

seemed to the soothed senses of the man in the dock as if some one were reading aloud in the next room.

After two hours of it the people in the body of the court began to yawn, and Gideon felt the greatest difficulty in repressing a yawn himself. What a wealth of detail, and how tiresome its iteration! They had heard it all before from witnesses and from counsel. To Gideon it was an old story—at least much of it was.

Whether it was all true, who shall say? That was the question which the judge, now reaching the close of his summing-up, was reminding the jury was for them to settle. How courteous he was to the jury and how obliging! Could he read any other portion of the evidence to them? If so, pray let the jury not be afraid of troubling him.

But the jury had heard enough, and gratefully saw the approaching moment when this low, monotonous voice should cease.

Gideon watched them as the judge drew near the end; but there was not much to be gained from scrutiny of their countenances, even by a man who in his Napoleonic days had prided himself on his ability to read character at a glance. Twelve ordinary men, drawn by lot from the sea of life outside, and brought hither to settle whether a fellow-creature should live or die. The responsibility was terrible. That they felt it was told by their sad and troubled looks. If any intelligence was to be gained, it was not hopeful for the prisoner who scanned their countenances.

The judge ceased. The jury left their box. His lordship retired behind the curtained doorway at the back of the bench, and a policeman touched Gideon on the shoulder and beckoned him below. How long he waited there he could not tell. If the succession of days through which the trial had lasted seemed twenty-four hours, this waiting down below seemed twenty-four years.

At length he was touched on the shoulder again, and knew he had to walk up the steps, back into the light of day, among his fellow-men—for the last time, he felt with a desperate certainty.

The jury had settled themselves in the box. The judge was attentive. The crowd in the court stared with fresh interest at the prisoner, though after a while their glance was distracted towards the jury-box, and they too were wondering what message these twelve men brought back, whether of life or death.

The gentleman in wig and gown, who had been busily making up his accounts at the table under the judge's seat, had now put aside his book, and was calling over the names of the jury.

Only twelve names and as many low responses, but to one man in court never were twelve names so long in the recitation.

Then there was the slow formula through which the fateful question was put—

‘Guilty, or not guilty?’

The answer faltered on the lips of the foreman—

‘Guilty!’

It was what Gideon had expected ever since he had heard the speech of the counsel for the prosecution, who had woven together a story so dovetailed at every point that it was hopeless to look to break it. Oddly enough, the only time he had permitted himself to think that another issue might result was during the long moments when the jury were answering to their names before delivering the verdict. At this last moment hope gave a desperate throb. But it was over now, and once more Gideon felt a strange sort of gladness.

‘Had he anything to say why sentence should not be pronounced upon him?’

Yes; he would say something now, though he had never spoken a word before. Napper would read what had been said

through all these days, or would at least hear of it. She might believe what he was going to say, and that was all he cared for. For the rest, he knew that a terrible and impassable wall was built up between him and the mercy of mankind.

‘My Lord,’ he said in a clear voice, ‘the jury have returned the only verdict possible for them. I have myself been amazed at the case woven against me. I am not sorry to have an end made of it; but, my Lord, I shall die innocent. I did not do this deed.’

The women in court having devoured all their sandwiches, drank all their sherry, and enjoyed the trial to the utmost, now broke forth into sobs. For the moment the crowded court, which had all along been against the prisoner, wavered. His words were so few, so simple, they seemed to carry conviction to the minds of those who heard them.

It was evident they carried none to the mind of the judge, who, in unshaken voice,

but looking ghastly under the shadow of the black cap, did what was left for him to do.

Then Gideon was led away between the two warders.

Napper *did* hear, and believed. When she read of the prisoner walking out of human sight with a gaoler at either hand, she said it reminded her of a passage in Keats's translation of one of Boccaccio's stories where the poet with bold imagining writes of a doomed man—

So the two brothers and their murdered man
Rode towards Florence.

‘That used to sadly puzzle me once, seeing that the man was yet alive,’ she said to Mr. Tandy; ‘but I see it all now.’

‘Do you, my dear?’ Mr. Tandy answered gently.

He felt there were many things dark to him that were clear enough to Napper. He was thinking just now not of difficult passages in poetry, but of the sudden and

absorbing interest in Gideon displayed by Napper. He had seen Gideon's intention to marry Napper. Was it possible that Napper could have loved him? He thought not, but he was greatly puzzled.

‘Do you, my dear?’ he repeated in a low voice and with distracted air.

CHAPTER XLII.

'IT WAS MR. DUMFY.'

It was spring time in Saxton now ; and whilst Gideon sat in his narrow cell thinking, not without some dull kind of satisfaction, that his life was drawing to a close, the flowers were springing up by hedgerow and in wood, the trees were clad in fresher foliage, and the sea, taking on a bluer tint, laughed among the pebbles on the beach for joy that summer was at hand.

Saxton was a very lovely place in spring, and in other years Napper had been one of the gladdest, prettiest things alive within a far-stretching circle of the country side. She knew which tree came out the very first, and days before the birthday was due paid visits to

it, watching the thickening buds. When the big lime-tree, sheltering the side of the road leading up to Dimwood, began to speckle itself all over with tiny leaves, then Napper knew that spring had come. And so did Knut, who madly chased imaginary lost sheep, darting about the field with his tail in the air, and his heels spurning the turf as he had often seen the young colts do.

Knut clearly perceived that something had gone wrong this year. Here were the violets and the primroses, the thicker grass and its fresher colour, with the trees everywhere brightening from brown to green. Splendid times for a scamper over the close turf, sniffing the sweet air that came from over the sea! But, somehow or other, Napper did not do her duty. Once or twice they had been out for a little run, and Knut had just arrived at the conclusion that things were all right. But thereafter for whole days, with the sun shining and the warm south wind

playing with the baby leaves, Napper stayed at home, or went no further than her household errands carried her through the town.

Also Knut very rarely heard her laugh, and he could not call to mind any recent occasion when she had attempted to hide herself from him.

This was a game Knut entered into with a zest superior even to that displayed by his mistress. Sometimes, at an epoch that appeared to him fixed in the last century, whilst his attention was diverted by a bird on a low twig—something moving in the hedge or fence a quarter of a mile across the downs, which required instant investigation—Napper had made away with herself down some narrow lane or behind some tree, and so given Knut several moments of anxious search. These were followed by peals of musical laughter from Napper when at last she was discovered, and joyous barking on the part of Knut, who had really been frightened at the thought that

some of those young men whom he had observed bounding the horizon whenever Napper took her walks abroad, had basely availed themselves of his temporary absence to abduct his mistress.

But that was all over now. Indeed, on the few occasions when they had got out for a run, Knut had ostentatiously scampered off, or made believe to have found something of profoundly engrossing attraction in the hedge, all the time keeping one eye on Napper. But she never made any move towards hiding herself, and presently Knut, with ears hung down and tail dropped, gave up the game and walked despondent at her heels.

It was natural that Napper, whose heart was tender enough to feel whatever of woe or human suffering she became conscious of, should be deeply touched by the calamity that had befallen Gideon.

But she had been smitten by a quicker and an acuter pang. She felt, with that confidence

which in women sometimes supersedes proof or the process of conviction, that Gideon was innocent. She had believed that judge and jury would find this out, and, though anxious, had awaited the issue of the trial with confidence. When the verdict was given and she gathered from her father that there was no hope, an indignant horror took possession of her, and was with her day and night.

It was a horrible thing the butchery of an old man. But that an innocent man should be taken, solemnly tried, and deliberately condemned to death, touched her with a sharper pang.

Since Gideon's arrest she and her father had returned to their older relationship. She never was very far from him, though he sadly said to himself that she was, and that there would never more be the times for him when Napper would be his companion and play-mate. But when trouble came Napper was

at his side again, and the two were no longer twain.

They were sitting together on this bright morning, Mr. Tandy with his newspaper, and Napper with a copy of the 'Diary and Memoirs of Princess Metternich.' O'Brien had got it for her from Leipsic. He had read it when in Germany in the autumn, and had talked about it to Napper, as in these later days he talked a good deal.

Knut, indeed, who had early taken the Captain into his favour, was inclined on consideration to dispossess him, having some faint notion that he had something to do with the altered manner of his mistress. The Captain was a good deal about the house, much more than to Knut seemed absolutely necessary for the business in hand. When he found that Napper could not only read German but speak it a little, he, under pretence of advancing her studies, conversed with her in that language. It was hard enough

for Knut to gather the meaning of the stranger when he spoke in his own tongue. But a man jabbering on in this guttural fashion was wholly incomprehensible, and, therefore, could mean only mischief.

‘Papa, put that newspaper down and listen to this a moment. This is what the Princess writes about her husband: “Clement works a great deal. I was with him for a moment, and, if I could have my own way, should always be leaning over his shoulder, to see how he writes his despatches. It is wonderfully entrancing. In the evening he talked in the most interesting manner over the events of the day, and continued the conversation when we were alone. What a wonderful man he is! God preserve him to me and to the world!” Isn’t that a delightful way for a wife to write about her husband?’

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Tandy; ‘but I dare say they had not been married very long at that time.’

‘That’s a very nasty remark, and I won’t satisfy your curiosity on the point, though you may have the book to look for yourself. Do you know that it gives me quite a new notion of married life? I never thought of it in that way before.’

‘And now you have, I suppose you will get married right off?’

‘That’s a little sudden, and I have not got quite so far; but if marriage really is anything like that, it cannot be so bad. Why, papa, it is very like you and me! I like to talk with you and help you with your work if I can, and often, when I see how you manage things for other people, think what a wonderful man he is; and every night and morning, and oftener too, I say “God preserve him to me and to the world!”’

Napper had laid her book down and gone over to her father’s chair, and as she spoke she smoothed his cheek with her soft hands, and, folding her arms round his neck, kissed him. .

This was the spectacle which hapless Captain O'Brien was privileged to behold as he entered by the open door of the dining-room.

It was, he had thought, a very pleasant thing to have the run of the house, call in as he passed on whatever trivial errand, and find Napper by herself and ready for a conversation. It was true that it nearly always was on a melancholy subject. Napper was consumed by the desire to do something to help Gideon, and was ever at O'Brien for news of the latest phase of the case, in the hope that she might see some way of doing something, however trifling, either to help Gideon in his trouble or to make it a little easier to bear.

This privilege was all very well in its way, but it was a big price to pay for the discomfort of being witness to such a scene. He had stood at the door long enough to hear Napper's last words, hesitating between the impulse to withdraw and the impetus of entering. He would

have liked to get away and call again at some more convenient season. But, in accordance with the instincts of a bold nature, he settled the matter by going forward and trying to look as if he had seen nothing.

In this endeavour he was assisted much more by Napper than by Mr. Tandy, who ought to have known better.

‘My girl was reading me a bit out of that book you brought her,’ Mr. Tandy said, looking as guilty as if he had been caught kissing somebody else’s daughter. ‘It seems a very nice family book.’

‘Yes, it is a charming work,’ said O’Brien, picking up the open volume which Napper had laid down.

Napper had, after the manner of less perfect young ladies, marked the passage that attracted her attention, and Captain O’Brien naturally read it through.

‘A charming picture this of married life,’ he observed.

‘That’s exactly what Napper was saying,’ Mr. Tandy cried, desirous by any means to turn the conversation into a channel remote from parental relations.

Captain O’Brien looked at Napper as if it were her turn now to say something.

‘Have you heard anything fresh of Mr. Fleyce?’ she asked, with a most distracting blush, called up by the extreme maladroitness of her father.

‘No,’ said O’Brien; ‘I am afraid we shall not hear from him or see him any more to any good purpose.’

‘Then you give up all hope?’ Mr. Tandy asked.

‘Yes; there was no recommendation to mercy from the jury, and it is not quite clear on what grounds you can move. You cannot plead insanity, and it would be non sense getting up a petition on the general ground of the unpleasantness of hanging a man.’

‘That may be your view of the case, Captain O’Brien,’ said Napper, turning upon him a flashing glance which he contrasted painfully with the way he had seen her look at her father a short ten minutes ago. ‘It seems to me there is the best of all grounds to go upon ; and that is, that if they hang Mr. Fleyce there will be two murders done instead of one.’

‘Yes, Miss Tandy,’ said O’Brien, meekly ; ‘that is your view, I know, and I am more and more inclined to share it. But here’s the verdict of the jury against us ; and if you read the charge of the judge, or heard it as I did, you would know there is no assistance to be looked for in that quarter.’

‘We can ask for a postponement for a month or six weeks on the chance of something turning up that the truth may come out.’

‘Quite so, my dear,’ said Mr. Tandy, who perhaps stood more in awe of this young Portia than did the gallant Captain, who,

though he had never been in battle, had faced an Irish constituency. 'But, don't you see, you must have some particular reason to urge, such as some fresh evidence forthcoming, or something turned up since the trial which, if it had been known, might have influenced the mind of the jury; and we have nothing of the sort.'

'Haven't we, Captain O'Brien?' Napper asked, turning sharply upon the retired officer.

'Nothing; except that when I saw Gideon after the trial he incidentally mentioned that his father had made a will leaving his money to charitable institutions, except, I believe, some small legacy to Mr. Dumfy. But I don't know there is anything particular in that.'

'I differ from you there,' said Mr. Tandy. 'That is a very important statement, and certainly ought to have come out at the trial.'

'How do you make it out?'

'Why, don't you see, if Gideon did this thing he meant either to rob his father or to

come into possession of his money. He certainly didn't rob him, for, as was shown at the trial, all the money is in the safe, and if he knew he was disinherited he would also know that he had nothing to gain by his father's death.'

'Oh, why didn't this come out at the trial?' Napper cried.

'Well, Fleyce didn't mention it before, and of course no one could guess at such a thing. But if Mr. Tandy thinks there is anything in it, we might see about working it out.'

'The first thing to do,' said Mr. Tandy, 'is to find the will. There would be no objection to your searching for it among the papers at Fulham. I will make application to the Solicitor to the Treasury, and of course they can send some one with you.'

'Now, Captain O'Brien,' said Napper in her earnest manner, 'will you go up to town at once and see about this? Papa, you can go too. There's no time to be lost, and there

is something else I want to say. It has been in my mind a long time. I have struggled against it hard, because I am not sure that it is not wicked. If it is, I only know I am trying to do right.'

'What is it, Napper? You can speak to us without fear of being misjudged,' said Mr. Tandy.

'Well, I am not only sure, as you know, that Mr. Fleyce did not do this horrible thing, but I feel I know who did.'

Napper, as she spoke, hung down her head, and with nervous fingers played with the buckle of her belt.

Captain O'Brien looked at her steadily; he thought he knew what was coming. Mr. Tandy was absolutely in the dark.

'Who, Napper?' he asked, in a frightened tone.

'It was Mr. Dumfy,' Napper said in a whisper, as if she felt she might be doing wrong to an innocent man, and, whilst bound

on her conscience to make the accusation, would not have it noised abroad.

‘Why,’ cried Mr. Tandy, feeling a load removed from his mind, ‘Dumfy’s dead and buried! You know he was in the railway accident.’

‘*Do* you know that?’ Napper asked quietly. ‘When this thought came into my mind I read all I could find about the accident. I studied the evidence given at the inquest, and I have asked questions wherever there was any chance of learning anything, and I don’t find there is any proof that Mr. Dumfy was in the train at all.’

‘You are quite right, Miss Tandy. I have a strange feeling on this matter myself, but have not seen anything that could be done without raising false hopes. Now you have spoken, I will say that there is at least no proof of Mr. Dumfy’s death.’

‘Mr. Dumfy is alive now,’ said Napper, in a decided voice, as if she had met him some-

where on the previous day. 'He's hiding somewhere, and ought to be found.'

'Does anybody know where he lived?' O'Brien asked.

Mr. Tandy did, having had to hold occasional correspondence with him; and, as the two men went up to town to obtain permission to go through the Spider's papers in search of the will, the more they talked the stronger became their conviction that Napper was right. There was very little they could seize hold of. It was a vague suspicion which had certainly floated through the mind of Captain O'Brien, but the chief support was the emphatic declaration of Napper. They were like men groping their way without any clear conception whither it led.

Mr. Tandy, whose legal mind was only impressed by legal proof, was not quite so sure as O'Brien of Gideon's innocence. Still he wished very much, since Napper was so distressed, that things might turn out more happily than at present they promised to do.

To this vaguely benevolent feeling O'Brien added a pretty firm conviction of Gideon's innocence and a growing suspicion of Dumfy's guilt. Since Napper had so emphatically denounced Dumfy, O'Brien felt his suspicions blossom into conviction.

It is astonishing what a marked effect unblenching assertion makes on the minds of men in doubt, but willing to believe.

Still, when one looked at it in that light, it was very difficult to say why Dumfy should have done this deed. If robbery had been his aim, why had he not robbed? Where was he now, and by what remarkable coincidence had he controlled affairs, so that the relics of his umbrella should be discovered amid the wreck of the burnt carriage, whilst he himself was at the time peacefully engaged in the pursuit of murder, and had afterwards got clear away?

Mr. Tandy put it in that way, and O'Brien felt a little staggered. Still he had always

had a dim suspicion of Dumfy. It had been confirmed in a most marvellous way by Napper, who, with something of the light of a prophetess in her eye, had unflinchingly pointed an accusing finger at Gideon's clerk.

'At any rate,' said O'Brien, 'there'll be no harm in making a few inquiries about him, looking up where he lives.'

'If there is anything in your suspicion,' said Mr. Tandy, 'that would spoil everything. I know where Mrs. Dumfy lives. I have, indeed, been to her house about some money matters for Fleyce. She seems a nice, tidy woman, and has her house a little painfully clean. It stood in the way of her taking lodgers; and I expect, now that a few shillings a week will be of supreme importance to her, she will have to put up with an occasional speck of dirt.'

'If she takes lodgers, the thing might be managed easily enough. Let's put in some one of quiet and inoffensive manners, with

instructions to keep his eyes open, and, if Dumfy's 'anywhere about, you may be sure he will be in communication with his home.'

'Well, if you like,' said Mr. Tandy, dubiously; 'it might be done, though I confess I don't think much of the scheme. Dumfy's dead and cremated, that I am certain of.'

'You were not so certain just now, when we were talking with Miss Napper,' O'Brien remarked a little spitefully. 'In any case, this is a matter of life and death. If we can save Fleyce from a shameful death, we ought to spare no effort. Do you know any one we could put in at Mrs. Dumfy's?'

'No, I can't think of any one at the moment; but I'll turn it over in my mind.'

'And, in the meantime, the day is coming on when it will be too late to do anything. I know a fellow that would do to a T, if I could catch him, and that is Jack Bailey. He's a shrewd fellow, and would go in for a business

like this for what he would regard as the fun of the thing.'

'Have you heard from him since he left Saxton?'

'Never a word or line; but I know his happy hunting grounds, unless they have suddenly been changed, and I will look him up this very night.'

The business at the Home Office prospered. No objection was made to Captain O'Brien, in company with a clerk from the office of the Solicitor to the Treasury, going through the Spider's papers in search of the will, or of some document that might lead to its discovery.

This done, O'Brien went on the trail of Jack, whom he hunted from place to place along the rendezvous of Fleet Street, and at last ran him to earth in a little public-house up an entry, the proprietors of which enjoyed a special licence to keep open during the night for the convenience of printers.

Jack was not a printer, but, as being dis-

tantly connected with the business, he took advantage of the hospitality of the 'Forme.'

'I am a feeder, you know,' he said, when O'Brien lightly touched upon the incongruity of his presence at the 'Forme.' 'It's no use there being printers, unless there are writers. They run the machine; I feed it.'

'If you'd feed more and drink less, my dear Jack, it would be better for you,' said O'Brien, distressed to see the ravages unrequited love and incessant whisky had made on Jack in so short a time.

Jack was delighted to undertake the task allotted to him. O'Brien had caught him just in the nick of time, when there was stealing over him one of those waves of remorse for his broken life and lost opportunities that sometimes welmed him. He would have done anything in the way of honest work, being at the moment a little maudlin with his long night's exercise. And this was a sort of occupation that suited him admirably.

He was to occupy lodgings rent free, have an allowance for his board, and keep his eye on a widow with whom he had to ingratiate himself. As far as that went, he felt every confidence in his powers. There were some people young and proud who had scorned him; but others had not been proof against his personal charms and acquirements.

Jack was of a sanguine disposition, and foolishly imagined for himself the typical widow, coy and debonnair, whose regard for her departed husband was soothed by the possession of his wealth, and the prospect of his successor.

Strange things come to a man from unexpected avenues; and Jack, swaggering home to his squalid lodgings over Waterloo Bridge, would not undertake to say what might not come of this new adventure.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE LOITERER ON THE DOORSTEP.

IT was something of a shock to Jack when he realised the fact that the person who opened the door, when he called to make inquiries about lodgings in Camden Town, was the widow with whose fate and fortune he had already linked his own.

The more Jack had thought over this matter, the more clearly he had seen his way to a happy settlement. His powerful and well-trained imagination had invested Mrs. Dumfy with all kinds of comforts, including a moderate covering of fat, and had even fixed her age. She was thirty-three, he knew. She was plump, *petite*, well favoured, and well off. Of course she was a little old for him; but that was a matter he must overlook.

A young Irishman, with his fortune to make, and some unsuccessful efforts behind him, is not inclined too narrowly to criticise detail of this kind.

So much engrossed was Jack with this castle in Camden Town that he temporarily forgot the real object of his undertaking, and was not disturbed with the apprehension that, even should the widow prove all his fancy painted her, her husband might turn up; and though, if he did, there was every prospect of his being shortly afterwards turned off, it could not be pleasant in such circumstances to marry his widow.

But Jack was of a reckless disposition; and when he built a castle, whether in Spain or Camden Town, he moved right into it, took in all his belongings, breathed its atmosphere, and never thought of rent day.

When Mrs. Dumfy opened the door to the caller she was a trifle more than usually unprepossessing in appearance. It was eleven

o'clock in the morning, and Jack had disturbed her in the middle of the consecrated task of polishing the stumpy legs of the sofa in the best and only parlour. When Mrs. Dumfy polished the legs of a sofa, or of any other article of furniture, she put her whole soul into the furniture paste. She had a notion that continued friction, carried on at the greatest velocity possible, and persevered in for a certain number of minutes—a space of time defined by the formula ‘as long as her back would hold’—was absolutely necessary to obtain the desired result. She polished the legs of a sofa as an Indian rubs sticks to get a fire, or did rub them when Fenimore Cooper was alive. Stopping short of a certain measure of friction the fire might not be kindled, and the labour had all to be gone through again.

On this principle Mrs. Dumfy polished her furniture, and it was Jack's misfortune that he happened to knock at the door when she

was something like midway through the process.

She might have stopped to finish it, and let the caller wait ; but she knew that, in such circumstances, men had a habit of rubbing their feet on the steps, or perhaps leaning against the railings or the door. Callers were to be got rid of with the least possible delay. So with a petulant groan Mrs. Dumfy left the half-polished limb, and, with a duster thrown over her shoulder, and a rag smelling vilely of furniture paste in her right hand, she confronted the cavalier who had a moment earlier walked down the street glowing with anticipation.

‘Good morning, madame,’ said Jack, not quite sure of the status of the lady. ‘I see you have apartments to let.’

Two months ago, whilst her husband was still alive, and some small source of weekly income assured, Mrs. Dumfy would have snapped forth an uncompromising reply at the

young man who had interrupted her in the polishing of the leg of a sofa, would have shut the door and so made an end of the negotiation.

The old impulse came upon her strongly now; but things were different. The house was her own, or had been her husband's, and so she remained in undisturbed possession. But beyond that, and some few hundred pounds in the bank, she had nothing to live upon.

Fortunately Jack, in anticipation of the buxom widow he had imagined for himself, had been most careful of his dress. In that one withering glance in which she enveloped him, Mrs. Dumfy noted that his clothes were brushed, that his boots were speckless, and his linen white. She must have some one as a lodger, and it was not certain she would get any one better than this.

‘Will you come in?’ she said to Jack, with a profound sigh. Life was very hard for her that she must needs take in strangers like this.

‘Brush your feet,’ she added quickly, Jack showing a disposition to walk straight forward.

‘Yes, it is a little muddy,’ said Jack, feeling the desirability of conciliating the household, and regardless of the fact that there had been no rain for a week.

He brushed his feet diligently and walked into the little parlour where the mahogany chairs and the prized though squat sofa might on emergency have served the turn of mirrors, and did display, as Jack moved about, blurred reflections of his manly form.

How nearly he was failing on the very threshold of his task Jack never knew. Mrs. Murgatroyd, who rented a room in Charlotte Street, and with whom Mrs. Dumfy used to exchange a tea once a month, was the *confidante* of this crisis.

‘He walked over two mats and wiped his boots under the Rev. Mr. Stubbins,’ Mrs. Dumfy told Mrs. Murgatroyd, who received the information with a proper expression of horror.

This merely meant that Jack, having diligently wiped his boots on the door-mat, dispensed with two other mats which lay in the short passage to the parlour, and, being in the room and seeing framed on the wall an engraving of a man with a fat face and a white necktie, walked up to look at it.

‘Most interesting face,’ he said; ‘a divine, I presume?’

Mrs. Dumfy’s soul was sad within her as she saw Jack’s boots moving about on the carpet, and called to mind the two mats over which he had walked. But needs must where poverty drives. Jack was a pleasant-faced youth, looked clean, and finally overcame objection by surmising that he ‘could have his tub in the morning.’

Mrs. Dumfy was inclined to take him literally, and, whilst not objecting to clean habits, descanted on the difficulty of getting a tub upstairs and down. But Jack, in further explanation, said he would bring his own bath

with him, which with his books formed his sole portable property.

So it was all settled, and Jack forthwith became an inmate of the bereaved Dumfy household, renting the front parlour and the top bedroom at the back of the house, overlooking the little yard, and beyond that the mews, from which through his open window in early morning there came the frequent odour of damp straw and other stableyard delicacies.

It was rather a depressing passage in Jack's life. It had been no slight shock to find for the imagined *débonnaire* widow this meagre female, with characterless and complaining eyes of light blue set above high cheek-bones.

But Jack was rich in the possession of a happy disposition. With the exception of some slight grief for Napper, he, as he said, never cried over spilt milk. Of course he had been very foolish in these imaginings about a non-existent widow. He had no right to expect

what he had done ; and when his castle faded into thin air, and for all wrack left behind the angular, cross-grained, sad-visaged Mrs. Dumfy, he laughed at himself and began to remember that his mission to Camden Town was of quite another kind.

A good-tempered, easy-going, merry-hearted youth, he completely ingratiated himself with his landlady. He even made her laugh sometimes ; and though perhaps she was a little less attractive at such times than ordinarily, Jack enjoyed his triumph, as all men are pleased with themselves when they have done something difficult of attainment and beyond the reach of ordinary people.

Perhaps never since Mrs. Dumfy had brought broom and duster into this house had its spotless walls echoed to this curious sound that was her laughter. She had never known any one like Jack. Rehoboth and its congregation were not given to laughter ; and the late Mr. Dumfy, though he sometimes

shone at convivial meetings down at Saxton, was, to tell the truth, a little grumpy at home. But here was this young fellow, always ready with a joke, never out of temper, and moderately cleanly in his habits.

It is true he objected, when he came in from town, to take his boots off on the introductory door-mat and put on his slippers then and there. Mrs. Dumfy had, the first time he went out, placed his slippers in readiness on the mat. Jack, not noticing them, had walked in and had positively been in the room for an hour with his boots on before Mrs. Dumfy discovered the disaster and brought in the slippers from the door-mat.

Even in this matter he fell in with her humour to a marvellous extent, and she began to look for his coming with pleased delight, only shaken by tremors lest he might bring in flake of mud or speck of dust.

Jack was understood to be something in the City; but he spent a good deal of his

evenings at home, and was glad to have Mrs. Dumfy to talk with him. The conversation Jack felt had a tendency to monotony of level, being on Mrs. Dumfy's side largely made up of narratives of iniquity on the part of the butcher's boy, the milkman, and the emissary from the grocer, who, Mrs. Dumfy felt quite sure, before they called at No. 48, spent a good deal of valuable time in getting their boots muddy or greasing their hands preparatory to touching the knocker or the handle of the door.

When Jack gently led her to talk of the departed Dumfy the effect was not encouraging.

'The old lady's waterworks are in good order,' as Jack put it to O'Brien when reporting on his mission. She wept copiously, though from her artless narrative Jack was not able to discover any reasonable cause of regret for the demise of that estimable person, Mr. Dumfy.

He seemed to have been selfish and overbearing. He lived on the best the household

afforded, and, if any fragments remained, Mrs. Dumfy might bring her basket and gather them up. One basket would serve, and it need not be of large dimensions.

The faithful woman wept at his name like a beaten dog will lick the hand that has held the stick. Jack watched her narrowly, and came to believe in her thoroughly.

‘She’s as right as ninepence,’ he reported to O’Brien. ‘The old lady hasn’t a soul above furniture paste. She has certainly not seen or heard anything of Dumfy as yet, and if he’s alive and prowling about he’s not made any signal to her.’

‘I’m afraid it’s a hopeless game,’ O’Brien said; ‘but keep your eyes and ears open, Jack; we’ve not much time now. In a fortnight we can rest from our labours.’

It was on the fifth night of his residence with the widow that Jack was dining with O’Brien, and thus reported himself. In the course of the week Mr. Tandy was coming up

and they were to make the search for the will. O'Brien sadly felt that thereafter he was at the end of his tether. Failing there, and Jack's mission failing, as it seemed certain to do, there was an end of all hope for Gideon, in whose innocence he more than ever believed.

Jack left early and walked back to his lodgings, thinking with an amused smile that Mrs. Dumfy, who evidently relished his company, would have been a little lonely. It was a dark night for the time of the year, and the long-delayed rain was plainly coming.

As Jack walked up the street, his thoughts turned sadly back to days in Saxton, he plainly saw on the doorstep of No. 48 a figure in a long surtout which by some quick process instantly brought his mind back to Mr. Dumfy. He had only just turned the corner of the street when he saw the figure, at too great a distance in such a light to make out the face. But he thought the man stooped at the shoulders, and he was certain that he had no hat on.

When Jack caught sight of him he was raising himself up as if he had been looking through the keyhole. Otherwise, if Jack was mistaken in that notion, the man had just quitted the house, or was standing on the doorstep previously to leaving.

Probably hearing Jack's footfall in the lonely street, the man left the steps and moved off with a rapid, gliding step that made Jack's heart palpitate with a dread recognition.

Jack was young and lithe, and he made after the stranger like a greyhound slipped from the leash. He seemed to be at the end of the street before an ordinary human being could have got round the corner. But there was not a soul within sight. The stranger, whoever he was, had the advantage that No. 48 was a few doors off a street that bisected it. Behind the house were the Mews, a thoroughfare by which the man might have doubled and so got off. He might have followed Fenton Street straight through, or he

might have taken one of the many turnings by which, in turn, Fenton Street was bisected.

Mrs. Dumfy's street was silent and empty, while Fenton Street, as leading into Hampstead Road, was moderately well peopled. Men went to and fro upon their business, and none whom Jack examined showed any trace of having just scampered off at full speed from the doorstep of a reputed widow. There was nothing to be seen here; and Jack turned back and walked rapidly to the house, determined to get to the bottom of the mystery before he went to sleep.

Before knocking at Mrs. Dumfy's he stood for a moment and regarded the house. The gas was on in the hall, and also in the front parlour, which he tenanted, though here it was evidently turned down to the lowest point. Mrs. Dumfy, he knew, was sitting up for him. She had a growing trust in him, but there was one point on which she would not give way. That involved the putting out of the gas the last thing at night. Jack had promised to

do this, and Mrs. Dumfy had belief in his good intentions. But she could not sleep in her bed without having been assured by fleshly contact that the gas was turned off at the meter.

This was one thing that habitually brought Jack home earlier than was convenient or agreeable. He knew his residence here was only a matter of a few more days, and, like the good-hearted fellow he was, he wished to give the old lady, as he was accustomed to call her (not that she was particularly aged), as little inconvenience as possible.

Mrs. Dumfy opened the door when he knocked; and except that she was a little cross at being kept up till nearly ten o'clock at night, with the gas recklessly burning in the hall and on about the size of a bean in the parlour, she looked much the same as usual.

‘Ain’t you a little late?’ she asked, with a tear in her voice.

‘A little late?’ Jack said, affecting a light-

ness of heart he did not feel. 'Fact is, if you only knew it, I am very early. We dined early, as my friend was going to the theatre, and I came straight up.'

'I don't know what people mean by getting their dinner at tea-time,' Mrs. Dumfy said querulously. 'I know such nonsense should never enter my house, with all the washing to be done when you ought to be going to bed.'

'Had any visitors, Mrs. Dumfy?' Jack asked, with well-contrived suddenness.

'Visitors at this time of night!' cried Mrs. Dumfy, with an expression of angered surprise, which if not true was well invented. 'I should think not.'

'No, of course not,' said Jack. 'Don't know what made me ask you. Perhaps, as you were lonely, Mrs. Murgatroyd might have looked in.'

'Mrs. Murgatroyd is in bed long ago, like all decent people. Besides,' Mrs. Dumfy added sharply—for there had once been a mistake to

her disadvantage in this matter—‘it’s my turn to go to her next. She was here to tea last Friday.’

‘Ah, well, we’ll go to bed now,’ said Jack ; and taking his candle he went up to his room.

Presently, when Mrs. Dumfy had put out the gas, which she lost no time in doing, Jack blew out his candle, stole softly downstairs, unbarred the shutters of the parlour window, and sitting well back, so that he could command a view of the street immediately facing the house, whilst he should himself be invisible, sat and watched.

He sat in the dark for an hour, intently gazing forth. Sometimes an approaching foot-fall made him breathe quicker ; but, as it came boldly on, he knew it did not belong to the man he had seen on the steps. By-and-by the policeman passed on his carefully regulated round, or a man went by hurrying homewards.

Duty was all very well ; but two hours sitting in the dark with the senses intently

stretched, goes a long way towards satisfying aspiration in that direction. At midnight Jack felt he had done enough for the night, at least in this part of the house. But he would keep his ears open through the night.

If this was Dumfy prowling around he would certainly enter the house at night, and Jack meant to receive him with open arms.

To which end he left his bedroom door ajar, threw himself on the bed half undressed, and whilst thinking over these matters, into which the figure of Napper constantly floated and vanished below the horizon as he had seen her disappear down the hill leading into Saxton, Jack fell into a sound sleep.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A BASKET OF ROSES.

As to what may have happened within, or in the immediate proximity of, No. 48 in the dead watches of the night, Jack would not have been a valuable witness. He was too young and hearty to make a first-class detective. The most touching and convincing proof of his love for Napper was to be found in the fact that regularly for a fortnight after his dismissal he had lain awake so much as two hours at a time after going to bed, resolving to think no more about her.

His gaping wound was closing up a little now. By-and-by it would be healed, and Jack would have been sorry to think it should leave no abiding scar.

Still it was a bad sign that, lying down

on his bed half undressed, and with thoughts of Napper flitting through the shades where he was pursuing the dead and buried Dumfy, he should not have been able to keep awake ; or that, falling asleep, he should have slept so soundly that when he woke the sun was shining into the room.

Jack made haste to visit O'Brien and report the adventure of the previous night. He found the Captain had visitors with him at his chambers. Mr. Tandy was there ; and, with a great throb of his patched-up heart, he discovered Napper.

It was a dreadfully awkward thing for him, he felt ; and if Napper had been as embarrassed as he, even Mr. Tandy, not usually acute in these things, would have had his suspicions aroused. But Napper greeted Jack as if she had never met him on the Downs, or walked away from him towards the setting sun, with which, as he thought, the hopes of his life were sinking.

She was too much engrossed with the great sorrow of the new murder that was to be done, to think of a matter that had made so slight an impression upon her as Jack's protestation of love. She had come up now to see Gideon. He had asked for her; and when O'Brien had given her the message she had frankly and eagerly said she would go.

O'Brien had had fewer opportunities of watching Gideon with Napper than Mr. Tandy had enjoyed, and it had never occurred to him to guess at what Mr. Tandy thought he knew for certainty. He had observed that Gideon took pleasure in Napper's company. But that did not occur to him as a remarkable thing.

Nothing was more natural to his mind than that every one should desire so to spend as much of this fleeting existence as Napper would spare to him.

Mr. Tandy, with this fuller knowledge, had hesitated a little about the proposed visit to the condemned man. He did not know

what painful discoveries Napper might make, and he was still puzzled by the girl's almost enthusiastic devotion to the cause of Gideon. Mr. Tandy was a good man and an able solicitor, and perhaps, therefore, had a hankering after the concrete. If Napper was thus deeply moved by the pending fate of Gideon, it could only be for Gideon's personal sake.

The notion of any one being so profoundly concerned simply for the sake of what was right was, of course, not altogether foreign to Mr. Tandy's mind. But it did not habitually occur to him.

Napper had said she would go, and there was an end of it. All that remained for Mr. Tandy was to bring her up to town, after having made with the authorities of Newgate the necessary arrangements for the visit.

Napper looked more bewitching than usual in the sad-coloured dress she had put on, and with this new look of sorrow on her face. Up to the moment Jack had flashed

upon her the unexpected fire of his love, the look most familiar to him on her face was one of merriment. Jack always amused her, and a bright smile, the meaning of which the hapless youth had mistaken, ever lighted up her face as he approached.

Now she smiled when she held out her hand to him ; but there was a serious sweetness in the smile, bewitching in its way, of course, but also mournful. Jack, whose mind had recently been running on widows, could not resist the thought that here was a fair young widow bravely bearing up against the loneliness and darkness of her new estate.

When Jack entered Napper had a heap of roses on her lap, which she had been daintily arranging in a basket. She was not sure that Gideon cared for flowers, at least when he was free and prosperous. But now, surely, he would be glad to have this basket of flowers, and Napper did not doubt that they who had him in charge would grant the

small boon of permitting him to have it near him.

She had heard of a convict who had tamed a mouse he had caught in his cell, and taught it to run up his sleeve and nestle at his throat. The warder, discovering the pet playmate, had killed it, and the convict had knocked the warder down. Whereat Napper, not usually eulogistic of brawls, had greatly rejoiced. But the mouse was a different thing, and possibly against the orders of the prison. There could be no harm in taking a basket of flowers to a man condemned to die.

She was arguing this at the moment Jack entered. Mr. Tandy, afraid of disappointment, had hinted at the possibility of refusal. Captain O'Brien, appealed to by Napper to say whether he thought it possible any one could refuse admission to the roses, had, in obedience to a slavish tendency daily growing upon him, given the answer she wished.

‘God bless her!’ the Captain said to himself, looking down upon her as she bent over the basket and arranged the flowers. ‘Newgate has not in its history had an opportunity of seeing so fair and sweet a flower. There’s nothing in the basket so good.’

Jack’s news wholly electrified and greatly elated the company. Mr. Tandy was cautious as usual, and dwelt on the insufficiency of Jack’s opportunity of seeing the stranger.

‘It might have been a tramp,’ he said, ‘or some one casually passing. Or it might have been a neighbour; and as to the running away, that’s not at all clear. Three doors further on is Fenton Street, and the man passing by may simply have turned a corner in the ordinary way, Mr. Bailey’s heated imagination lending him wings.’

But Napper, with her delightful air of conviction, was sure it was Mr. Dumfy.

The process by which this conclusion was arrived at was exceedingly simple. She had

made up her mind that Dumfy had murdered the Spider. He had then run away and hidden himself for a while. Now he was going back to his lair in the dead of night, as she had read hunted animals do.

Of course there were a few discrepancies in this theory. Mr. Dumfy had not been hunted, and there was absolutely no evidence to connect him with the murder. Still when a young lady has made up her mind as to the premises, conclusions follow with great rapidity and irreproachable neatness of adjustment.

Napper vividly realised the misery and anguish the wretched man must have undergone. The little detail Jack mentioned of his having no hat on lent outline and colour to her fancy. She straightway divested Mr. Dumfy of his boots and stockings. He had sold all his possible-to-be-disposed-of garments to buy him bread, and thus, wan and half clothed, unshaven, hungry, and hunted, she saw him in her mind's eye prowling the streets

at night, and hovering about his once happy home.

As a matter of fact this was the picture of an able tramp she had one winter afternoon seen walking into Saxtor, and to whom she had given half a crown, which, in company with a handful of other coins of more or less value, had been found tied up in a dirty pocket-handkerchief when twenty minutes later he was seized by the police, who recognised in him an old and accomplished vagrant.

But Napper had in not less degree than Jack the faculty of vividly realising scenes and personages, and she was even conscious of her feeling against Mr. Dumfy being modified by sorrow for his low estate.

It was arranged that Jack was to dine early, go straight home and spend the evening in his rooms, and watch for the return of the loiterer on the doorstep.

Jack himself announced his cunning intention of retiring to his bedroom under pres-

sure of headache, since he could not very well sit up with his gas down, and darkness was necessary to watch the street, himself being unobserved.

‘We’ve no time to lose, Jack,’ said O’Brien. ‘If anything’s to be found in this way it had better turn up soon. To-morrow Mr. Tandy and I have an engagement with a clerk from the Home Office to go through the old man’s papers in search of the will. If we find that, and it turns out as Gideon says, there will be some good grounds for petitioning for a postponement of the sentence. But of course a much better thing would be to find Dumfy, and that I hope you will do to-night.’

Jack would have liked to go with them as far as Newgate; not that he had any desire, or indeed opportunity, of seeing Gideon. But if he spent another hour in Napper’s company, under the safe conditions of having her father and O’Brien at hand, it would be pleasant. But he was not invited to join them. So,

taking his leave, and subsequently hanging about the house, he had the satisfaction of seeing them go out, enter a four-wheeler (No. 9087, figures ever afterwards sacred in Jack's memory), and drive off for Newgate.

It was a cruel thing, Jack felt, as he walked towards Fleet Street, that this chance should to-day have befallen him. He had ever been the sport of fortune; and now when he was getting all right, and had lived down his great sorrow, Napper had come again, and he was plunged deeper than ever into the abyss of hopeless love.

As he wrote down in his diary, rather fancying the sentence and thinking that at some time he might use it in print: 'The kindly hand of Time had bound up the wound, when rosy fingers came and ruthlessly tore the bandages off.'

It was shortly after this that there appeared in the Poets' Corner of the *Beacon* the following lines:—

THE HARP OF MEMORY.

Oh, Harp of Memory, cease that strain,
Do let that one thought perish,
Love's fire, ill fed, would quickly wane,
Did thou its flame not cherish.
But ever, as I strive to think,
The gulf is growing wider :
Thou, treach'rous friend, dost forge a link
To chain me still beside her.

And all the world seems leagued with thee
To see my proud will languish ;
'Tis well the world can never see
My proud heart in its anguish.
'Midst Nature's charms I seek to find
Kind Lethe's fabled waters,
But they can only call to mind
The fairest of her Daughters.

In music I would seek relief,
And sorrow drown in singing ;
But in each thrilling melody
I hear her clear tones ringing.
One time I thought she was designed
My load of care to leaven ;
Vain hope—but I will be resigned,
We still may meet in Heaven !

The verse was signed 'Leo,' was dated from Lampborough, and the writing, though clearly not in Jack's hand, lacked something of natural flow. It may have been all right; but Jack, we know, was given to break forth in verse when he thought much of Napper, and the assumption of local authorship may have been a little device to hide his identity.

However it be, the coincidence was striking, and Jack certainly had a copy of the poetry cut out, and carried it in his pocket-book till the following October, when he heard something that made him burn the extract, and a considerable mass of manuscript the contents of which are not known.

It was well for Jack he had the excitement of a first night's watch upon him. He had not been to Fleet Street since he had undertaken his new mission. Now, feeling a little shaky, the old hankering after gin and bitters stole over him, and there came back the old yearning for the grasp of feverish and not

over-cleanly hands, which he was sure to meet with after a few days' absence in any of his places of call from Ludgate to Temple Bar.

He passed a pleasant afternoon, though its engagements did not leave him very hungry for his dinner, and fortuitously he had no need to simulate headache when he got home just before dusk.

‘I do hope,’ said Mrs. Dumfy, anxiously, ‘you haven’t got a lighted pipe in your pocket, have you, Mr. Bailey?’

‘No,’ said Jack, guiltily conscious of the fumes of tobacco. ‘Fact is I sat next to a man on the ’bus who was smoking a pipe. I’m going to lie down on the sofa a bit, and shall save your gas. Been working hard all day, and get rested in the dark. A little tired, but I dare say I’ll come and have a chat with you before you go to bed. Haven’t seen you lately, don’t you know.’

CHAPTER XLV.

ABSALOM.

MRS. DUMFY—who, if the melancholy truth must be told, had sometimes noticed in connection with the smell of tobacco-smoke about the late Mr. Dumfy's clothes a slight incoherency of speech on the part of the wearer—arrived at the conclusion that Jack had been drinking. This was quite true. In the course of the afternoon spent in Fleet Street, Jack had gone through a good deal of the dual labour known in the locality as 'standing drinks.' Jack, who was always first in duties of this kind, paid for 'a round,' and then the round paid for him.

It will be easily seen that with a party of seven or eight, a good many gins and bitters,

merging into whiskies and sodas, may be consumed in a summer afternoon.

But it was not the first time Jack had similarly occupied himself, and among many other recommendations to comradeship was the fact that he was not easily knocked over. He felt he was all right now as he shut the door, turned down the gas, pulled back the curtains, and recommenced his watch.

He was wide awake, and eager for the fray. It was half past eight, an hour and a half earlier than when he had seen the loiterer on the previous night. But he could not tell how long he might have been there. The danger now was that, in addition to being a thin-weasand female, Mrs. Dumfy might be a consummate actress, and had been fooling this clever young man of the world. If that were so, she would give the signal when Dumfy turned up again, and he would be off like a stag that smells something in the wind.

If she were moving about, he would know.

He opened the door, and listened at the head of the stairs. It was a cellar kitchen, and he could hear Mrs. Dumfy bustling about cleaning pans. He left the door ajar, and sat at the window, himself hidden from observation.

It was a much lighter night than when he had watched there last. The rain had cleaned the street, and sweetened the air even in this town within a town. Nevertheless, night had fallen, the lamps were lit, and lights twinkled from the windows opposite.

Jack had been sitting patiently for half an hour, gratefully thinking that if his present task were ended he would soon be quiet and in peace. He was tired of it now the excitement and the novelty had worn away, and left only the bare and loveless house with its unlovely mistress. Even now he would like above all things a pipe of tobacco. Yet what wailing and moaning there would be supposing he were to light up, and the odour of the fragrant weed, stealing downward into

the kitchen, where Mrs. Dumfy was still clattering with the pots, should reach her pinched apology for a nose !

Jack sometimes thought if he had a little money to spare he would like to go out one day when London mud was at its thickest, revel in the roadways, then come home, walk straight into the parlour, and tramp upstairs with his boots on. The excitement would be severe, but it really might do this ridiculous old woman good, and he would finally present her with a half-sovereign to cover all possible damages.

Whilst thus musing he had been looking down the street in the direction in which the loiterer had disappeared on the previous night. Turning his eyes away for a moment and looking at the house opposite, he saw in the shadow a man looking across at Mrs. Dumfy's house. He was standing quite motionless.

It was the same man, Jack knew, for he saw he had no hat on, unless a something he held

in his right hand, which in the distance and in this light looked like a brown-paper parcel, was a billycock hat. He was staring steadfastly at Mrs. Dumfy's, and Jack had a queer notion that he was looking straight at him. He sat rigid, not moving a muscle, lest he should frighten the man off before his time. He felt that he must see him, and know that his eyes were fixed upon him. Jack himself felt spellbound, and thought the man must be in the same condition.

That it was not so, and that the stranger was totally unconscious of being observed, appeared from the fact that after looking up and down the street he softly crossed the roadway and made towards the door.

There was not a moment to lose. Jack gently drew back from the window, kicked off his slippers, which he now regarded as provisionally worn, and stole along the hall to the front door. He must make haste, but his motion must be noiseless. The man was as

fleet as a hare, and had a way of disappearing which would make it very uncomfortable to be on his track in stocking feet.

The gas light in the hall was fixed by the staircase, designed a double debt to pay, lighting both the stairway and the hall, and failing to do either effectually. It was quite light enough for Jack to put his hand on the catch of the door, without fumbling for it. Gripping it firmly he pulled back the latch, flung open the door, and almost fell over the man on the doorstep, who was in the same attitude in which Jack thought he had seen him on the previous night with his eye at the keyhole.

The man's head being nearest to his hand, Jack seized him by the hair, and held on with all his might.

‘What are you at?’ cried the man in a whining voice.

‘What am I at? Where's your hat?’ Jack asked in a stern, accusatory tone.

It perhaps was not the most heinous offence

the stranger might have to answer for, that he should go about without his hat. But Jack was a little excited, and began with this by way of opening the indictment.

‘Now you jes let go,’ the man whined. ‘It’s come to a nice thing if a respectable man can’t call upon his friends without some one leapin’ out upon him through the front door like a panter. You just let go my ’air, or it’ll be worse for you.’

Jack did as he was bidden ; but he released his hold upon the man’s hair only to fasten it upon his collar, which he found considerably less greasy. There was a mistake somewhere, it was clear. The man was not Dumfy, but he might be an emissary of the fugitive, and Jack was not going to sit up two nights for nothing.

‘Well, as you were going to call, you might as well come in. Here’s Mrs. Dumfy, who will perhaps be glad to see you.’

‘Oh, dear me, Brother Dyas!’ said Mrs.

Dumfy, appearing on the scene, attracted by the noise and the scuffling on the doorstep. 'What's the matter? Is it the water's got through this time and swamped the chapel? and me left my books there and best hassock.'

'It's nothing to do with the chapel, Sister Dumfy,' growled the harried deacon, inclined to assume the offensive now there was a witness at hand. 'This may be a respec'able house for all I know. But they ain't all respec'able people in it. Jumpin' out on one through the front door like a panter or a dromydairy!' he added, turning with a snarl upon Jack.

Mrs. Dumfy, being somewhat at a loss to understand the episode, had taken refuge in tears, which she wiped away with her apron, and then diligently wrung out imaginary moisture from the corner.

'Upon my honour I am sorry if there's been a mistake anywhere,' said Jack, trying hard not to laugh; 'but you see, old fellow, if

you come prowling around here every night, peering through keyholes, how am I to know who you are?'

'How are you to know who I are?'

Brother Dyas snarled. 'Well, to begin with, I'm not Habsalom to be caught by the 'air in that way. What d'ye mean by yer "every night," and yer "keyholes"—jumping out on a hinnercent man like a boa-constrictor?'

It is impossible with the limited sources of type to convey any impression of the withering tone of intermittent rage with which Brother Dyas introduced these similitudes, which were reminiscences of an Easter Monday visit to the Zoological Gardens.

'Dear! dear! Brother Dyas,' moaned Mrs. Dumfy; 'and I suppose you hadn't time to rub your feet on the mat.'

They had now got into the parlour, and Jack, having lit the gas, was trying to look apologetically at the infuriate deacon, in imminent danger of further incensing him by

untimely laughter. Feeling now safe, and seeing that Jack was not mad, and was inclined to excuse himself, Brother Dyas fumed and glared, every particular pimple on his face ablaze with wrath.

‘Brush my feet on yer mat!’ he cried, turning angrily on the weeping widow, and apparently finding much comfort in repenting the last words addressed to him. ‘Why, I hadn’t time to lift myself up after tying my shoe before this ’ere young jackanapes jumped out upon me like a tiger on his peray.’

‘Come, old man,’ said Jack, ‘don’t bear malice. You see if you will come at this time of night to tie your shoe-strings on the doorsteps of lone widows you mustn’t be hard on those who make mistakes.’

‘Mistake, was it?’ Brother Dyas sneered. ‘Perhaps you’ll find it a mistake that’ll cost you somethin’ ’ot. I’ll have the law on yer. I’ll have the question settled once for all whether peaceful citizens is to go about

their reg'lar business, paying wisits to their friends, and whether young stuck-up jackanapeses is to leap out upon them through front doors like—like a panter,' Brother Dyas added, after brief hesitation, and, feeling that he had exhausted his stock of zoological similes, going back for safety to the original one.

'Well, perhaps I'd better leave you,' said Jack. 'You called to see Mrs. Dumfy, and here she is, a little damp about the cheeks, but otherwise hearty. I hope you'll make yourself comfortable in my room. Sorry I haven't anything to offer you.'

'Oh, you've offered me enough,' said Brother Dyas, walking up to Jack and putting his mottled face unpleasantly close. 'I've seen enough of you for one night, and as I've been made more free with than welcome I'll go. Good night, Sister Dumfy. I *did* come thinking to spend a quiet hour and a half in conversation, ghostly and otherwise.

I *may* have got here a matter of a pork pie,' Brother Dyas added viciously, jerking out into full view a brown-paper parcel he had carried in his left hand, and which had become a little battered in the encounter on the steps. 'It may be a pork pie or it may be a 'eap of ruings. It's not usual, in this country at least, for pork pies to be jumped out upon from front doors like a kengeroo. It may be the thing where kengeroos grow; it's not the ticket here, young man.'

'I don't quite know what it's all about,' Mrs. Dumfy said, still wringing imaginary moisture from the corner of her apron, 'but I'm very sorry.'

'Sorrer's neither here nor there. Sorrer never mended a hole in yer coat, nor made a pork pie entire once it 'ed been mashed. I'll call again some other time, Mrs. Dumfy, when you have treated your 'ouse like the man who was possessed of a devil was treated. He was turned out, young man,'

he said, turning fiercely upon Jack. 'I mention of it because you may not know. Young good-for-nothings, who pass their time in jumpin' out from front doors on hinnercent passers by ar'n't likely to read the Book. I bid you good-night, Sister Dumfy. Praps I'll call again when you arsk me, praps I won't. And as for you, young man, if there's lor to be had we'll see whether people as pay their rates can't walk the streets o' night without other people who praps aint got any rates to pay, nor money to pay 'em with, springing out on them like the pelican of the wilderness, spiling their 'air and mashing their supper.'

With these few remarks Brother Dyas strode forth angrily, tugging at his hair with intent to bring it into something like order, and carrying with him the wreck of the pie which he had hoped to bring to light under quite different circumstances.

Jack threw himself on the sofa and shrieked

with laughter, whilst Mrs. Dumfy continued to weep, alternately bewailing the indignity done to Brother Dyas, and the damage sustained from his not having had time to use the door-mat.

As for Brother Dyas, he walked home in a state of mind not wholly befitting a deacon. There was more in this evening call and propitiatory pork pie than met the eye. On the day when he had visited the widow in her affliction, self-commissioned with Brother Selth to break the news of Mr. Dumfy's shocking death, there had occurred to him the notion that he and she might, as he put it, sit in the same pew.

He had quite an exaggerated conception of the wealth of our dear brother departed. Mr. Dumfy lived in his own house and had a few hundreds in the bank, which certainly was well for a man in his position, though perhaps not too much for a man with his opportunities. But, somehow or other, he had lived in the odour of the sanctity of riches. He had always

been regarded as 'a warm man,' and Rehoboth looked up to him accordingly.

Brother Dyas was conscious of uncertainty as to the precise amount of his wealth. He was not going to sell himself and his fine head of hair for a trifle. He would worm out of Sister Dumfy her precise position, and would be guided accordingly.

He had opened the campaign at Rehoboth, where he had overwhelmed the widow with attentions. Now that Brother Dumfy was gone, he permanently occupied the seat under the pulpit, and more than once, in the eyes of the whole congregation, had stepped down and presented the open hymn-book to the widow to save her the trouble of finding the place—

'A givin' it just like a card from the tailor's shop,' Miss Griffen, in the back pew, had giggled.

He had looked after her comfort in other ways. Only last Sunday night she had found a cushion at the back of the pew, and had

reason to know, before she left, that it had been placed there by the friendly hand of Brother Dyas.

She was very grateful for these attentions ; and when the senior deacon and agent for the anonymous proprietor of the chapel had said he would call upon her, she, with quite unusual warmth, said she hoped he would.

Brother Dyas's opportunities of social intercourse were bounded by the exigencies of the shop. The establishment did not close before eight o'clock in the summer time, and up to the last moment Brother Dyas might have been found outside with the circulars in his hand, and every passer-by who looked likely to want a pair of ready-made trousers or a slop-coat had one affectionately pressed upon him.

On the previous night he had been detained beyond the usual time, and after making his way to Mrs. Dumfy's, and reconnoitring, had come to the conclusion that

perhaps it was a little late to call, and had quietly walked home by Fenton Street, without the slightest idea of the excitement he had created in Jack's mind.

To-night he had left at eight o'clock sharp, and had *en route* purchased the propitiatory pork pie, intending to bring it out with the ingratiatory manner with which he produced a circular, and invite the widow to sup with him. That would seem homely; and shortly, perhaps, when her heart was cheered by the highly spiced meat, and her soul comforted with the substantial pie-crust, she might be led to drop a few words of desired information.

All this had been spoiled by 'this young jackanapes, leaping out upon a person through the door like a cammyleppard,' said Brother Dyas angrily, as he stamped into his lonely bedroom, and, opening the brown paper parcel, anxiously endeavoured to rearrange the battered pork pie.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE SEARCH FOR THE WILL.

THE Bijou residence in Fulham had been shut up ever since the day when there was carried out in a strong box all that was left of the merry old gentleman. On that day in particular, and for several days after, the quiet street was peopled with a throng that came and stood opposite the Bijou residence, and stared at its dismal front. Many of those who formed the crowd were evidently not bachelors of fortune, and none of them had any apparent intention of renting the house.

If it had occurred to them they would doubtless have been ready to assume anxiety to succeed the old gentleman in his tenancy,

enter the house, since that would have given them the right to walk through its rooms, and stand under the very ceiling that witnessed the tragedy. 'Cards to view' would have been eagerly sought, supposing they had been available.

But there was no present intention of re-letting the house. Things were altogether in a state of considerable confusion. If the old gentleman could have settled the difficulty by taking his riches with him (whithersoever he had gone) it would have been some comfort. As it was, it seemed that the Crown would be benefited by the unremitted labours of the Spider working from youth to age.

Gideon was the only relative, who in ordinary circumstances (since there was every reason to believe the old gentleman died intestate) would have come in for the wealth.

But, as we know, Gideon was not in ordinary circumstances, but rather in Newgate, and the day was drawing nigh when he too

should fare forth, and in some far-off country father and son would meet once more.

The Solicitor to the Treasury had had the full run of the old gentleman's papers and possessions. He had looked for the will, not in immediate connection with the trial, since no point had been raised bearing upon the document, but with the object of settling the question of the Spider's intestacy, and the consequent distribution of his wealth. He had found nothing, had reported the old gentleman as dying intestate; and in due course, when Gideon had been hurried off the scene, the Crown would blandly step in and gracefully appropriate everything.

Nevertheless, when urgent application was made on behalf of the prisoner that his friends might make a search, no objection was offered, and no restriction put upon investigation, beyond the passive presence of a Treasury clerk.

‘Poof, how the place stinks!’ said O’Brien,

as they entered the old gentleman's former sanctum. 'I should fancy the windows have not been opened for a year or two.'

They were promptly opened now, and the unaccustomed air stealing in crept about the dingy walls, along the floor, and up the yawning chimney, where in times past slack had been so lavishly burned. The grate was rustier than ever, and the room dingier. Nothing had been touched of the furniture. There was the chair in which the old gentleman had been found ; there the table, the inadequate strip of carpet, the odd chair or two, and even the pan that used to play so important a part in the high revels of alternate Sabbath evenings.

There, too, was the safe. The gold had been taken out and lodged in the Bank of England, together with a large bundle of bank notes and a small handbarrow full of bills, bonds, and scrip, representing the bulk of the Spider's ingatherings. What was left behind

in the capacious recesses were letters, account books, and receipted accounts.

Of these last there were several huge files ; the old gentleman whilst alive having had a morbid terror of some one whom he had once paid coming upon him with fresh demand. Therefore he had stored written receipts of everything, and filed them carefully.

The key produced by the Treasury clerk worked easily enough in the lock of the safe. It had been bent only at the bow in the desperate struggle, of whatever nature it might have been, that had apparently taken place within view of the old gentleman as he sat in his chair, with the gathering film of death beaten back for the moment by a gleam of vindictive triumph that had seemed to rest upon his face when we first found him in the long night through which he sat and slept, and never more awakened.

The heavy door swung back, and there before them were the papers.

‘If no one minds,’ said O’Brien, ‘I’ll smoke a cigar. It’s a wholesomer smell than would be found in this musty old room.’

‘Do, by all means,’ said Mr. Tandy, quite eagerly. He didn’t smoke himself, nor, as a rule, welcome the perfume of tobacco. But anything would be better than this musty smell. It was horribly like being in a tomb.

They took the papers, bundle after bundle, and searched as if they were seeking a string of pearls. Here were letters written in faded handwriting, some of which O’Brien thought he knew. There were all kinds of handwriting, chiefly bad, with a tendency to schoolboy style of forming the letters.

One peculiarity common to them was that the writers were in a general tone of buoyancy. Things had been looking a little black lately. They had had a rough time; but it was all over now. In a week, a fortnight, in three weeks, if good Mr. Gideons would either give them time or (in some cases the prayer ran)

hand over another fifty, or one hundred, or five hundred pounds, they would be able to repay to the uttermost farthing with suitable interest.

Neither Mr. Tandy nor O'Brien read these letters, but they opened each one, looking for inclosures or even for writing on the fly-leaf. O'Brien knew the Spider's habitude with respect to stationery. It was his boast that, with the exception of envelopes, he had not paid a penny for stationery for thirty years. He had many letters, and took toll of most. If people were so foolish as to take a whole sheet of notepaper when half would suit their purpose, the other sheet was certainly meant for gentlemen like the Spider.

Whether it was or not, he tore off the fly-sheet, or, if there were only half a sheet, that was carefully cut off as near to the last line of writing as possible and the unused part carefully put away.

Besides this there was a world of wealth

in envelopes. Cut open the flaps at the sides, and there you are with a sheet of clean paper on which any ordinary letter might be written, or any series of memoranda or calculations made. Of late years the Spider's correspondence had considerably fallen off. But fly-sheets and envelopes increasing out of proportion to his letter-writing, the searchers found quite a heap, on which they eagerly pounced.

They knew well enough that if a will was to be found it would not present itself on lordly foolscap, written in clerkly hand. The Spider would be his own legal adviser in the matter, his own clerk, everything but his own witness, and what he would draw the will upon would certainly be one of these fly-sheets or envelopes.

Hitherto, Mr. Tandy and O'Brien had worked by taking a bundle and going through it individually. The sight of this heap excited such high hopes, and was deemed so important, that they devoted their joint ener-

gies to its investigation. Mr. Tandy had the bundle before him, and, taking up the sheets one by one, looked at them back and front, and handed them to O'Brien, who made a new examination and then rebuilt the pile.

This was excessive care and some trouble that might perhaps have been dispensed with. But they felt that this was a last chance. After these papers there remained nothing but the files of paid bills, milk accounts, the baker's bills, and dealings with the coal merchant. So they made their way manfully through the heap of fly-sheets and envelopes.

They were all blank, except that one or two had a rough drawing of some of the Spider's mechanical contrivances for keeping out robbers.

'There's nothing here,' said Mr. Tandy, ruefully. 'I don't know whether there is any secret drawer in the safe.'

'It's like enough, and I think we should have it taken to pieces or tapped by an expert.

It's not proper to say anything but good of the dead, but I'm bound to say that if old Israel Gideons had his choice of doing a thing secretly and doing it openly, it would not be done openly.'

'There's nothing here but household bills,' Mr. Tandy continued, taking up one of the huge piles of bills and regarding it hopelessly, 'and I don't know whether it's worth while going through them.'

'I think we should,' O'Brien said; 'it's a matter of life or death, and it would be some satisfaction to us to know that we have left no stone unturned. I'd always be thinking that the will was stuck on one of these files if we didn't go through them. Let's take one apiece; we'll soon get it done.'

They sat down at the table and went steadily through the accounts, for the most part dirty little bits of paper, being receipts for twopence for a week's milk, up to 3*s.* 3*d.* for a wholesale importation of slack.

‘Hallo!’ cried O’Brien, taking off the file a large sheet of paper with items fully set forth and added up on the last page. ‘Here’s a whopper! The old gentleman’s been agoing it this time. Total, 20*l.* 3*s.* 4*d.* This can’t be for milk or even for slack. What’s all this about: “24*a* Walworth Road, September 20, 1878, Israel Gideons, Esq., debtor to J. Gorringe. To cutting out floor in front room, self one day and three hours; to fixing iron-work as per contract; to taking off door of safe and adjusting springs; to bricking up cellar door.”’

These read rapidly aloud by O’Brien were just the heads of which innumerable details were set forth, down to the price of two dozen 3-inch screws. The account had evidently been gone through with great care. Each item had been ticked off, the pen had been run through one or two, and in some cases the amount charged had been reduced by a few pence or a shilling. Mr. Tandy and O’Brien

read it through together, and when they had finished instinctively turned to look at the safe and at the floor before it.

So far as they could see, there was nothing that had any connection with this honest tradesman's account. The safe reposed within a recess made in the wall and peacefully projected a few inches. There was no sign of the cutting out for which Mr. Gorringer had charged.

Nevertheless, there was borne in upon them a strong conviction that since the bill had been paid the cutting out had certainly been done. Israel Gideons had some of the failings common to human nature ; but to pay for work that had not been accomplished was not one of them.

'This is a very curious affair,' said Mr. Tandy, drawing his chair a little further from the safe.

'Very,' said O'Brien, getting up and walking over towards the safe.

'Don't you think you had better be careful?' said Mr. Tandy.

‘Not more now than hitherto,’ O’Brien answered, going down on his knees and carefully examining the floor. ‘Here it is!’ he shouted, tracing a line running out from the wall a distance of five feet, then running parallel with the safe and back again at right angles to the wall.

Mr. Gorringe had done his work with great skill. So neatly was the floor sawn across that in the dim light that usually pervaded the room no casual caller would have noticed it. Lengthwise the division of a plank had been taken advantage of, and here of course discovery was still less likely.

‘We must find this man,’ O’Brien said, ‘and get to the bottom of this mystery. If you don’t mind we’ll go at once.’

CHAPTER XLVII.

MR. GORRINGE, JOINER AND UNDERTAKER.

It is a far cry from Fulham to the Walworth Road, but Captain O'Brien and Mr. Tandy rapidly bowled across in a hansom, and fortunately arrived just as Mr. Gorringer was wiping his lips on the back of his hand after his one o'clock dinner, and was inclined to take a cheerful view of life.

One curious result on Mr. Gorringer's mental constitution of the absorption of food and a midday pint of beer was that, whilst they soothed him and made him to all appearances genial and friendly towards mankind, they also made him exceedingly suspicious. He was not accustomed to have two gentlemen call upon him in a hansom, which they kept waiting

at the door regardless of cost. If they wanted a job done in the joinering way, that was clear and straightforward. But he had at once ascertained that that was not their purpose.

The more they thought the matter over the more sure they were that this trapdoor covered some horrible mystery, and there was some look of this in their eyes and in their manner as they confronted Mr. Gorringe.

‘We’ve come to see you on important business, Mr. Gorringe,’ said Mr. Tandy, in his solemnist manner.

‘Is it a coffin?’ Mr. Gorringe inquired, drawing a bow at a venture.

He did a little in the undertaking line, and was accustomed to be called on suddenly.

‘No, it’s not anything in the line of your work, though it’s on a matter of business in which you are concerned, and of which I am sure you will tell us all you know.’

‘Well, gentlemen, if it’s not in my line of work praps ye’ll call agen some day when I’m out. I live by my work, you know, and time’s precious; a shilling a hour is the nett walley of my time.’

‘You shall have half a crown an hour as long as we keep you,’ said O’Brien, impulsively.

This was a bad shot, having the effect of greatly increasing Mr. Gorrings’s suspicion that the strangers were after no good. People who didn’t want work done, and paid half a crown an hour for it, could scarcely be engaged on a lawful undertaking.

It might be body-snatchers, Mr. Gorrings thought; in which case, he added emphatically, they had come to the wrong shop.

‘Well, gentlemen, I’ll tell you plain. I don’t know anything about it, whatever it is; and if you don’t mind, as it’s gone one o’clock, I’ll go after it.’

‘Come, Mr. Gorrings,’ said Mr. Tandy,

‘we’re not going to eat you or ask you to eat any one else. You knew Mr. Israel Gideons?’

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Gorringer, drawing himself up stiffly; ‘I once knowed a person of that name, and a wery hard person he were to deal with; so wery hard that I don’t want to have anything more to do with him. Thanking him for parst favyers, I decline to do any more.’

‘Well, it’s not likely you will. Of course you know he’s dead?’

‘That’s just where you’re wrong. I’ve had no dealings with him for a matter of four ’ears, and never hearn or seed him since he took one pound two shillings and fourpence off a bill he’d already hammered down till, as you might say, its head was druv clean into the plank.’

‘Here’s the bill,’ said Mr. Tandy, producing the document. ‘It seems a very moderate charge before anything was taken off.’

‘Now you have it there,’ said Mr. Gorringer, warming a little towards a gentleman of such sound views, ‘I kin tell you when I’d paid my ’bus fare from the Elephant to the top of Sloane Street and back, I lost more nor made anything out of his business. He screwed me down orful.’

‘Well, he’s dead now, and, I may say, screwed down himself. I wonder you have not read of it. The Fulham Murder has been in everybody’s mouth for weeks.’

‘It may ’a been, sir, but it never passed my lips. I’ve no time to read papers. I never got a shillin’ a hour out of them.’

‘It’s this murder we came to talk about, Mr. Gorringer; and I’ll tell you at once you’ll be well rewarded if you can give any information.’

‘Thanky for the reward!’ said Mr. Gorringer, sarcastically. ‘Seeing I didn’t know there was a murder, I couldn’t wery well lay my hand on the man as did it. That’s fair and

straight, ain't it, mister?' he said, turning to O'Brien.

'Quite fair, Mr. Gorringe; still you can help us, I expect. It's about this work you did for Mr. Gideons. I'm afraid we're keeping you from your work; and, if you'll allow me, I'll just give you this sovereign to pay in advance for any loss of time. That's nothing to what will be due to you if you can help us to clear up this fearful mystery.'

Mr. Gorringe looked at the sovereign with glistening eye, and further tested its genuineness between his iron-bound fingers. There was no doubt it was all right, and was good for twenty hours of his time. Certainly he would not be out of it if he gave them one hour just to see what their game was.

'Take a cheer, gentlemen, take a cheer,' he said, diligently dusting with the corner of his apron the rush-bottomed chairs. 'Now if I can till you anythink as I knows you're wery welkim to it. Nothing can be fairer than that,

can it, mister ? ' he added, turning with a fresh appeal to Captain O'Brien, whom he had come to regard rather as a disinterested looker-on in an encounter between Mr. Tandy and himself—a looker-on, moreover, who paid a man twenty hours' time in advance.

‘ Nothing, Mr. Gorringer, nothing at all. We mean fair to you, and all we want to know is how you came to do this sawing out of floors and building up of doors for Mr. Gideons.’

‘ Well, sir, it came about in an ornery sort of way. The old gentleman was always pottering around with little things, and before I set up for myself I was a journeyman for Messrs. Parsons, who did odd jobs for him. In fact, it was the old gentleman who set me adrift, for he got me to do his work on my own account, thinking it would come cheaper, which it did. The Messrs. Parsons got wind of this, and told me to pack off. After that I was often with him ; eightpence a hour he

paid me, and if there was any odd pence in the bill he always knocked 'em off. One day he told me he had a big job on hand. It was to get his safe set in the wall. I didn't do the brickwork, but I took the measurements, and got some man as did it cheap for him.'

'Did he say what it was for?'

'He told me that he had a lot of papers as was allays accoomelatin'. They filled up the safe, and it had to be cleared out reg'larly. What he wanted was a room underneath, where he could drop them and keep them moderately snug. They were worth nothing to anybody but the owner, he said, and not much to him neyther. He drawed out the plan. I sawed out a trap-door, which let down into a sort of pantry underneath. I made the ceiling good, bricked up the doorway and all but a bit of a winder that gev out into another cellar that runned under the room towards the street, and there you was. None

could get into this place from the outside, and I don't know as any one could get out of it from the inside, unless he was kindly 'elped from above. It was a deal of trouble to take for storing old papers, I said to the old gentleman ; but he said it amused him, and he'd nothing to do with his time, being retired like, and was allus fond of pottering round with meckynisims.'

'How did the trap-door open?'

'He had a beautiful arrangement that he inwented himself. You could set the trap-door so that a harmy might march over it and nothin' happen. But if you turned the key after he'd set the spring in some way which he did hisself, down went the trap-door, and you with it. Otherwise, when the safe was locked in the ornery way you might stand there as firm as a rock.'

'How could he work it without tumbling in himself?' Mr. Tandy asked, falling naturally into the cross examining style.

‘Oh, you trust the old gentleman for that,’ said Mr. Gorringer, winking. ‘He’d get a piece of board laid across on two chairs, like a piece of scaffolding. Then he set the spring, opened the door, and down went the trap like a shot, and, brought back by another spring, closed up with a snap, and there it were as innercent as a bit of honest planking. “Ain’t it wery dangerous?” I said to him, when he showed me how it worked.’ “Wery dangerous,” says the old gentleman with what passed with hisself for a smile, “wery dangerous indeed, Mr. Gorringer, to any gentleman as might open this safe without saying by yer leave. If you was to come here in the night, Mr. Gorringer,” he says, “and open this safe to look for anything, I’d know where to find you in the morning.” I can just see the old gentleman now,’ said Mr. Gorringer, closing his eyes meditatively, ‘grinning at me and really looking as if he would like to hear

the click of the trap and know I'd gone down. He was a wery merry old gentleman, though 'ard as nails in money matters.'

'And where was the spring to be set?' O'Brien asked. 'Was it inside, or outside?'

'Ah! there you have me. That's jest what he wouldn't let on to me. He was wery careful to show me how the thing worked. I was the only chap he ever had about the house, and I think he was not sorry for me to know what would happen to me if I went wrong. I says to him, just in fun like, "If I was to come and open the safe at night, I'd put a plank across two chairs like you've done." The way he larfed was fit to tumble off the plank, and I'm quite sure he'd got some other dodge to meet the case. He never said a word, but only larfed fit to kill hisself. I think he thought I'd do it, and drawed me on with his planks and chairs, though excep' perhaps in the little matter of working on my own account with one of Messrs. Parsons's

customers, I'm a honest man, and he drawed me into that. As to the spring, I bleave it was somewheres on the inside, leastways I have seen him fumbling there afore he opened it. But, lor bless yer, he was that cunning it was never safe to bleave your own eyes when yer saw him do anything.'

'Mr. Gorringe, I told you just now we shouldn't want any work from you. I think we shall. You bricked up the doorway?'

'Well, to tell the truth, sir, it worn't me exackly. It was a bricklayer's 'prentice I got in.'

'Well, you know where it was, and can take it down again?'

'Yes, sir, I could do that; but it's a long way to Fulham.'

'That will be all right, Mr. Gorringe. As I told you before, you'll be well paid.'

'We can't start to-day, O'Brien,' Mr. Tandy said: 'we'll have to get permission, and we'll of course want somebody from the Home Office to

see this thing done. Will you be at Fulham at ten o'clock in the morning, Mr. Gorringe? Bring whatever is necessary for breaking open this doorway, and bring help if you like.'

'You may rely on me sir,' said Mr. Gorringe. 'I'm wery busy, but when work's well paid for it must be done.'

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE SKELETON IN THE SPIDER'S CUPBOARD.

MR. TANDY and Captain O'Brien were punctual to their engagement at the bijou residence, having in the meantime obtained the necessary authority to break through the doorway. Mr. Gorringe was also punctual, accompanied by a small boy of some thirteen summers, with respect to whom O'Brien had a suspicion (which proved to be well founded) that he meant to charge his time by the hour at full price.

'Ah,' said Mr. Gorringe, looking down with pardonable pride at the trap-door, 'though I says it as shouldn't, it's not a heasy thing to sor through a hoak floor, and not leave the splitting o' a hair in the wood.'

There was a decided tendency on the part of the company to keep clear of the trap-door. Even O'Brien, who had reasoned with himself that it was no more dangerous now than it had been during the previous stages of the inquiry when he and Mr. Tandy had stood upon it at the same moment, did not think the trouble of making a slight *détour* too much in order to avoid stepping on this particular spot.

Mr. Gorringe, who was totally unaffected by the dread which weighed down his companions, cheerfully led the way downstairs. He was in no particular hurry. To be paid at the rate of half a crown an hour was an unaccustomed interposition of Providence, and it was not for him to show himself ungrateful by hastily getting through the time.

The staircase apparently led directly into a cellar which ran underneath the dining-room and gathered some dim light from a grating in the street. Coming down from the upper room, it seemed almost dark in the cellar. But each

man carried a candle, and when their eyes grew accustomed to the place they could make out some of its bearings.

‘There you are, gentlemen!’ said Mr. Gorringe, waving his candle towards the upper part of the cellar wall facing the grating at the end nearer the stairs. ‘There you are,’ he repeated, as if they were at a panorama and he were pointing out objects of special interest. ‘You’ll see a little patch o’ whitewash there a bit darker ’n the rest. That’s where the windy was as my mate bricked up, and the whitewash, being put on immediately after, turned a little black over the new place. There’s a four-inch grating to let in the air so as not to have the papers musty, but it don’t come to much. And here,’ he continued, with fuller throated pride, having saved the greatest marvel for the last, ‘here’s the door as we bricked up, least-ways, there it were *afore* we bricked it.’

The bricked-up door was now part of the wall which, with the stairs on the other side,

formed a passage running into the cellar. The cellar had a door of its own. The smaller room had probably originally been a scullion's pantry, and, so far as they could judge from the run of the wall and the position of the window that had looked into the cellar, it was about eight feet long and four feet wide.

‘That’s what I calls a pretty strong safe wault,’ said Mr. Gorringe, looking at it with an air of proud proprietorship. ‘It would ’old a good many papers too, and you can see nobody could get at them verry well from the outside.’

‘Get to work, Mr. Gorringe,’ said O’Brien, ‘and let’s have this horrible suspense over.’

‘All in good time, sir,’ said Mr. Gorringe, deliberately divesting himself of his coat and turning up his shirt-sleeves, an example gravely imitated by the small boy, who also, and with equal gravity, rolled up his sleeves.

Mr. Gorringe had brought with him a chisel and a crowbar, with which he set to work with such skill that in half an hour he

had made a considerable hole in the wall and the door behind was clearly visible.

The bricks were of course only single, and once a hole was made the doorway was soon disclosed to full view.

‘There’s a good business made o’ *that*,’ said Mr. Gorringer, ‘and a drop o’ hale wouldn’t be amiss wi’ a dusty job like this.’

‘Never mind the beer just now,’ said O’Brien: ‘you shall have a good pull when we get the work finished. Down with the door.’

‘That’s easier said nor done. This is a good hoak door, and I well recollect the old gentleman locking it and taking away the key. “It won’t be wanted again,” he said, larfing to hisself. It’s a different thing putting your thumb on the latch, or turning a handle and opening a door, to breaking it down with a crowbar. That’s fair, ain’t it, mister?’ said Mr. Gorringer, turning to the young gentleman from the Home Office, who was not quite certain that the calls of duty, combined with a natural

interest in this ramification of a famous tragedy, altogether compensated for the necessity of holding a tallow candle in a damp vault with dust and dirt and bits of brick flying about.

It was clear Mr. Gorringe would work better with a can of beer near him ; so the small boy was despatched for it, and Mr. Gorringe, restored to good humour, applied himself to the door.

O'Brien, placing his candle on the stairs, lent a hand with the crowbar. The door began to sway under the influence of the two powerful men. A better hold was got by the lever, and with a strong pull the lock gave way and the door moved backwards, but slowly, as if a sack of flour were propped against it.

‘I expect it’s chock full of papers,’ said Mr. Gorringe ; ‘they don’t smell very sweet neyther. There’s nothing at this end anyhow,’ he continued, peering in. ‘I reckon they’re all piled up behind the door.’

As Mr. Gorringe held the candle at arm’s

length inside the partly opened door, O'Brien saw something which, combined with the excitement of the morning and the horrible odour of the place, turned him sick. He leaned against the staircase and felt that he was going to faint.

The clerk from the Home Office had already retired from the scene, and was taking his observations from the top of the stairs in a comparatively pure atmosphere. Mr. Tandy, who had not seen what had caught O'Brien's eye, was agitated, but bore up better against the influences of the place than might have been expected.

At this moment the lad returned with a can of beer, and O'Brien seized it, regardless of the reproachful glance cast upon him by Mr. Gorringer. He felt better after he had moistened his throat with beer, and pulled himself together to go through with the work.

'It's a body that's lying across the doorway,' he said in a whisper; 'look there!'

O'Brien had taken up his candle and again held it so that its light was thrown within the cellar.

Mr. Tandy saw a man's foot. It was heel uppermost, and the man was evidently lying on his face behind the door.

'This ain't papers,' said Mr. Gorringe in an awed voice. 'This 'ere's worse 'n papers, and it's a sort o' job I don't like to be in.'

'We're in it now and must get out of it,' O'Brien answered sharply.

He would rather Gorringe had undertaken the task, but since he shrank from it O'Brien put his shoulder to the door, and, slowly forcing it back against the dull weight that lay against it, made his way in.

There was a man there sure enough, lying on his face. He seemed to have used his last strength to crawl to the delusive doorway, and had died with his mouth down to the bottom of the framework of the door, hoping to suck in fresh air, and not knowing of the brickwork outside.

The other two followed O'Brien into the charnel-house. They turned the body over, O'Brien and Mr. Tandy fearing what the action should disclose.

An almost fleshless face, skinny hands, and a shrunken body that ill-fitted the clothes was what they beheld by the dim light of the candle. But there was no doubt of the man.

It was Dumfy.

He had a scar on his forehead, where he had struck the floor in falling through the trap-door. Also, as later and more careful examination showed, the palm of his right hand was torn where he had held on for a dreadful moment to the key in the safe. His coat was open, and a piece of the left lappel was torn off.

Mr. Tandy and O'Brien knew where the fragment was.

Close by him lay the remains of a black leather bag. Nearly half of it was apparently gnawed with teeth.

‘Rats,’ said O’Brien with a shudder.

‘Ne’er a rat in this cellar,’ said Mr. Gorringe. ‘It was all cemented round and made proof against that sort of thing. The bag’s nearly gone, but the chap’s eat it hisself.’

This was not a place to linger in, but rather to get out of post-haste into what seemed the deliciously fresh air through which the sun was shining on London. The clerk from the Home Office had no desire to make nearer inquest. He had heard everything from the top of the stairs, and was quite content to base his report thereon. Nobody wanted to stay in the house.

So the four grave men and the scared boy made haste to quit it, locking in the sole tenant, who lay on his back staring up with lack-lustre eyes at the treacherous trap-door through which he had descended into his living tomb.

There was no doubt about its being Dumfy. Beyond the likeness, still plainly apparent, to

his former self—a weird likeness such as a skeleton might bear to a living man—he carried about him abundant testimony of his identity. There were letters addressed to him, and in his own handwriting a list of the hymns and tunes he had given out at his last service at Rehoboth. There was also his season ticket between London and Coldharbour Junction.

How he came there must for ever remain matter of conjecture. It is probable that when he stole away from the vestry to catch the train back to Saxton he had not meant deliberately to murder or even rob, though the idea of suddenly coming into possession of some of the riches he knew the safe contained may from time to time have assailed him as he sat at the old gentleman's banqueting table. It was strange, too, that on this particular night he should have carried with him this deep black bag conveniently full of emptiness.

It was certain he had gone straight to the station, taken his seat in the train, and in

another five minutes would have been out of the way of temptation.

Who knows with what battling of soul he sat there clutching his empty black bag, perhaps wishing the train would start a minute or two before its time, and so deliver him from evil? But the train must keep its time, and Dumfy, leaving the carriage to carry on his self-wrestling whilst walking on the platform, must have yielded at the critical moment when the whistle sounded.

He might have jumped in even then. But he did not, the train steamed out of the station, and the way was clear to Fulham.

Perhaps none of these things happened. Possibly, if we prefer to take the blacker side which conjecture leaves open, Dumfy had planned the whole thing, and his taking the seat in the train and leaving his umbrella there may have been part of some cunning scheme to cover, if necessary, his disappearance after the commission of the crime. But he could not

have foretold the accident to the train, and no useful purpose that one can see would have been served by the appearance at Coldharbour Junction of his ownerless umbrella.

However this may have been, it is certain that Dumfy would easily have found admittance to the bijou residence. He was, indeed, expected, a circumstance which adds some colour to the theory of deliberate design in what followed. The old gentleman had his savoury supper set, and on the table the knife which, if not specially made to do murder, did it with uncommon neatness and despatch.

Dumfy evidently lost very little time after his arrival. He would see that the key was in the safe, and that with the old man out of the way all his possessions would be his.

A careless playing with the handle of the knife ; a firm grasp suddenly closed over it ; a swift upraising of the arm ; a deadly well-aimed blow, and the work was done. Except that the old man, stricken to death, reached

out his hand and with convulsive grip seized the murderer by the coat, and Dumfy struggling with him to get free, holding him back in the chair with one hand whilst he tore at his wrist with the other, left behind him the silent testimony of the desperate deed.

Here again Dumfy was greatly helped by accident, and had it not been for the trap-door would have got clear away with his booty. He had put on Gideon's coat, not with any special reference to the night's work, but because he often borrowed his master's plumes when going out upon state occasions. Gideon had so many clothes he would never miss an odd coat, and, as he came quite near enough to Dumfy's size, that gentleman had for years availed himself of the happy coincidence.

When Dumfy got free from the dying man he evidently ran straight for the safe, at which sight the bitterness of death for Israel Gideons was tinged with a malignant joy. He had been inclined to make use of Mr. Dumfy for his own

petty purposes. But he knew him thoroughly, much better than did Gideon, with all his capacity for swiftly judging men. He knew his crafty, mean disposition, and knew by intuition that he was robbing Gideon. He made the one mistake of thinking that Dumfy's capacity for crime did not go beyond pettifogging proportions.

He did not think he would dare to rob a safe, much less slay a man.

Still it was no good having a contrivance at hand if you didn't use it. Consequently, whenever Dumfy was expected, the Spider arranged his infernal web to catch him, should he ever trip with guilty intent in the direction of the safe. The old gentleman, in pursuance of his merry humour, had more than once left the room and stayed away as long as ten minutes, whilst Mr. Dumfy was there with the key in the safe and the springs set.

He thought the temptation might be too much for him—to be within arm's length of

heaps of gold, only to turn a key, thrust in a hand, and quietly resume his seat before an unsuspecting old gentleman was back !

On these occasions Mr. Dumfy had sat with lips literally watering and his eyes greedily fixed upon the safe. He would certainly have fallen into the trap but for a strong suspicion that at that very moment, from some unseen aperture, the old gentleman was watching him. It was a prevailing quality of the atmosphere breathed by the Spider, that whilst he suspected everybody of mean dishonest designs, he was himself constantly the object of similar suspicion.

As a fact, he was not watching but listening for the click which would show that the trap-door had fallen and closed over his guest engulfed in terror and darkness. He had meant nothing worse than to go in, cry aloud his marvel at Mr. Dumfy's disappearance, spend an hour or two in the room, then ostentatiously make preparations for retiring to bed, and finally,

at the last moment, when he expected Dumfy would be half dead with fright from the shock of the fall and with terror at the prospect of being left there all night, he would have opened the door and tenderly helped him out with many protestations of surprise and regret.

That was a little comedy he had often rehearsed when alone, and hoped some night to enjoy. Now, with the chill of death stealing over him, and his heart's blood pouring out from the wound in his breast, he saw the comedy turn into direst tragedy.

He knew what would happen, hungrily looked for it, and died with Dumfy's shriek ringing in his ear as the wretched man disappeared from human ken.

The heavens that bend over London look down on many strange tragedies. But surely on this quiet Sabbath night there was none more weird than that closed in by the roof of this bijou residence, in a little street off the old Fulham highway.

In a chair in the room above, the old man dead, with the firelight playing around him. In the room beneath, the living man rushing madly around and around the walls of his tomb, ever returning to the door which seemed so easy for despair to break open.

They kept each other company, we know, for nearly a week, with only the drawing-room floor between them. At what time, before or after, Dumfy lay his head on the stone floor by the doorway, and found surcease of hunger and of worse pain, we do not know, nor is it profitable to conjecture.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A LAND WHERE IT IS ALWAYS AFTERNOON.

SUMMER had come to Saxton, and the little town, the level sea, and the green country were steeped in its warmth, and colour, and light. On an afternoon like this, which would have been sultry but for the breeze, born in the Atlantic, which came rustling up the Channel just rippling the waves, Saxton was more than usually quiet. No one seemed to have any particular business on hand; or if they had, with one consent they had deferred its accomplishment till the cool of the evening.

Mr. Tandy's house was on the shady side of the street as the shadows fell after noon, and Knut lay in the open doorway with his head

on his paws, his mouth open, showing a row of teeth gentle in love but terrible in war, and his eyes blinking at the sunlight on the panes opposite.

When he had first come out to lie here and wait for his mistress, he had been betrayed into some snapping at the flies that chased around or walked within provoking distance of his nose. It was too hot to indulge in violent exercise, and the efforts made were not successful. If the weather had been cooler the flies would have circled round Knut at their peril. But then in cooler weather there were no flies, or none to speak of.

This, to Knut's mind, seemed a curious oversight on the part of Nature, and provided him with food for reflection as he lay watching the flies with one eye and taking in with all his mouth whatever air was stirring. Knut might well have been accepted as an emblem of Saxton as he lay in the doorway, so as to be ready for Napper when she came out. Full of peace

and quietness was Knut. But within his shaggy breast lurked possibilities of being deeply stirred, just as this quiet little town with its red roofs fronting the sea had lately shown that it, too, might have its tragedies and its moving scenes.

Whatever of life beat within the parliamentary boundaries of Saxton was just now down on the beach. It was August, and Saxton's high 'season.' Year by year as the golden month came round an average of twenty people sought relaxation and recreation at Saxton. Then were a few more novels of soothing influence got in at the circulating library. Then did the wine merchant issue his circulars—'Good sound claret, 14s. a dozen; champagne, light and dry, 2s. 9d. a bottle'—and then was Tom Traddles (formerly in the employ of Mr. Griggs, but discharged during the excitement preceding the general election) sent round with a circular addressed to each occupant of the lodging-houses on The Terrace. Then did the butcher kill the fatted calf. Then

did the fishmonger send to London for an extra supply of fish, probably caught, in the first instance, within sight of the church tower. Then did the greengrocer, in his most charming of shops—where you tumbled down a secret step on entering, and on rising bumped your head against the ceiling—get in a fresh store of fruit and vegetables that filled the air with fragrance, and invested the buying of a cucumber with an added grace.

Last year, when the turmoil of the election was near at hand, the visitors had been somewhat neglected, and ‘the season’ had failed to send through the town that flutter of excitement that even reached the church on the hill, where the curates knew they would have one or two people from London to hear them twitter from their safe nest in the pulpit, and peradventure would find an extra shilling or half-crown in the box, when, twice a day, it went round in search of what were humorously called ‘offerings’; meaning takings.

But this year things were different. Saxton had had its election and something more. After Gideon had been carried off to London and Castle Fleyce had been placed in charge of the gardener and his wife, a terrible reaction had set in. The combination of excitement had been too much for Saxton, and, acting in conjunction with the bitter disappointment attending the non-distribution of expected, and even discounted, tokens of the candidate's regard, something like a feeling of torpor born of utter weariness had fallen upon the place.

The world had long been accustomed to forget it. It had suddenly remembered it with a vengeance, and now, if Saxton could be left to go on its old sleepy way it felt it would be well.

This feeling had lasted a couple of months. Then, as 'the season' approached, public spirit began to revive. The arrival of the first visitor was enthusiastically hailed, and those preparations hinted at above were zealously undertaken.

The strangers from town on the beach were just now steeped in the indolent languor that follows upon unaccustomed sea-bathing. When they had bathed there was nothing else to do. There was no pier at Saxton. No nigger band had ever made the sea round the red-tiled town laugh with their subtle humour, or had caused the sweet strong air to vibrate with their melodies. There was nothing particular to do except sit and stare at the English Channel, as 'stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes,

He stared at the Pacific, and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise,
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.'

Fortunately in these circumstances there was only one bathing-machine. This vehicle might be said to be the life and soul of fashionable existence at Saxton. Around this clumsy and colossal contrivance hurtled as much of human passion as if it were Constantinople or Schleswig-Holstein. Who got it first, and who third, and—deepest dolour—who twentieth, was

at Saxton the question of the day or at least of the afternoon. By what wiles, devices, and strategy precedence was obtained, with what flashes of courtesy precedence was sometimes concluded, were matters which had a tendency prematurely to age Mrs. Barkins, who had charge of the machine.

But their development made the time pass pleasantly and with abundant interest in the full height of 'the season.'

To the 'Longshore men 'the season' was the great feast of the year. The ship never came in, though daily and hourly looked for with keen eyes and most patient attitude. It always sailed past Saxton outward-bound, with brightly painted hull and rigging all taut, or homeward-bound, weather-stained and a little ragged aloft. But August never failed to come round. Sometimes, it is true, it was a little wet; but then it was safe and certain.

Everything was to be done when 'the season' came. Arrears of rent were to be

paid, the little bill at the butcher's was to be met, and the larger account scored up in the slate ledger at the Dog and Duck was to be wiped off. Then brawny arms would be bared and stalwart frames bent to labour. In view of which prospect it was clearly necessary in the meantime to take abundant rest.

‘One month shalt thou labour and through eleven months loaf’ was written in the Decalogue of the ‘Longshore men.

June was quite a bustling month for them, for sometimes strangers came straggling down in July. In anticipation of that event the boats were dragged lower down on the beach, caulked and tarred. In July they were launched, and a month was usefully employed in getting them watertight. They had a wonderful way of leaking, to the discomfort of the July visitors.

‘It is a leetle wet, to be sure,’ said Round Tommy to Captain O’Brien and his companion, whom he was rowing out, not too swiftly, ove

the main in the solemn summer night. ‘But what there’s of it’s in the starn.’

‘Exactly. That’s what I complain of,’ said O’Brien, who was anxious, not for himself, but for his companion.

They—he and she—had been walking on the beach and had seen, a mile out at sea, a vessel at anchor with its ghostly yards tapering to the sky. Napper had felt a great yearning to be somewhere near the silent ship, and O’Brien had straightway gone off to the Dog and Duck, almost rolled Round Tommy out as if he had been an empty tub—which he was not, being in fact considerably more than half full—brought him down to the beach, and with his own hands had done more than half the work in launching the ‘Seraph, of Saxton.’

They had lifted Napper in, and off they went along the silver path which the moonbeams made, and which led straight out to the silent, motionless ship.

Napper knew nothing about the water

leaking through the dry boards and collecting in the stern. She had her eyes fixed on the ship, and was making out a history for it, feeling very happy and pleased to be here on this silver avenue of the waveless sea.

O'Brien was very wrath to think that even the hem of her garment should be dabbled in the sea water. He glowered upon Round Tommy when he gave this answer. But Round Tommy, as we know, was not given to darken counsel with words. He didn't particularly care for being trundled out at this time of night, when no man could reasonably be expected to work. The only prospect that pleased him was that of the half-crown he would presently receive, and which he had already dedicated to the Dog and Duck.

This had happened a month ago. The 'Seraph, of Saxton,' was watertight now, and Round Tommy had earned many a half-crown since. At present he was standing on the beach with his far-away gaze set seaward, and par-

tially intercepted by the head and shoulders of Caulker Jack.

This last was an incident that in no way disturbed Round Tommy's regard. He was accustomed to look seaward, and if it happened that any one got between him and the prospect that was their affair.

Now he stared at the brown throat of Caulker Jack as if the ship had been signalled off his nose, and might presently be expected, if the wind held fair, to double the cape of his chin and reach the long-desired haven.

Caulker Jack's position was an accidental one, due to the habit, already hinted at, of the 'Long-shore men to gather about Round Tommy as if he were the axle of a wheel and they the spokes. They had been standing thus, a dozen all told, half an hour and no one had spoken or moved, or withdrawn his gaze from the distant horizon, or such portions of it as were not intercepted by the exigencies of grouping.

Most of them had the tasty quid in their

mouths, and as they moved their jaws and looked out on the distant horizon they bore a certain resemblance to a herd of cattle standing in dreamy content chewing their cud.

‘I hearn at Goldfinch’s that he’s agone to Ameriky.’

It was the voice of Round Tommy that suddenly smote the silence which brooded over the group. Elsewhere it was broken only by the laughter or highly pitched talk of children playing on the beach, or by the low swish of the sea as it fell upon the pebbles.

Nobody else spoke for a minute or two. Conversation to be thoroughly enjoyed must be properly digested, and the digestive machinery of Round Tommy and his companions worked slowly. Conversation was rare. Why hurry through its enjoyment? Rather, as a connoisseur sips a rare wine, let us enjoy our interchange of thought with decent intervals.

‘Well, it were a blamed bad job, take it all through,’ continued Round Tommy after due

pause. 'It seems to me we're allus in ill luck. Ayther it's a wet season, or there's scarlet fever in the Terrace, or it's so rough that no one 'll go out, and yer don't take half a crown in three days. Relse yer 'av a go like this election. Everything goes on swimmingly. Ye've three pun from one side sure, and yer pretty nigh certain of three pun from the other. Then a hold bloke in London goes and gets murdered, our man's whipped off, and there yer are!'

This was rather a sustained effort of conversation for Round Tommy, and was made to appear the longer since the delivery was slow, its full accomplishment making an appreciable hole in the long summer afternoon.

Its conclusion was hailed with acquiescent groans, and here and there a man hauled his hands from the depths of his pockets, moved the poise of his body to the other leg, shook his shoulders, and then, with a sigh, put his hands back into his pockets.

'Ay,' said Corkey, seeking out a fresh

foundation in the shingle for his wooden leg, which, having been in the same place two hours, showed a tendency to bury itself, as if it were a pile. 'Ay, mate, an' him as we worked for night and day. A've shouted myself hoarse with only an occasional pint.'

'Worst o' me is,' said Bo'sprit, taking up the conversation after a lull of ten minutes, 'I'd spent that three pun 'fore the day. I bought myself a new rig out for tuppun eight, and I gave five bob for a shawl for the missus, making sure to clear 'em off when we got the three pun on Saturday night. When the whole thing drifted off I pawned the missus's shawl, but only got three bob on it.'

This was regarded as a matter not without its recommendation of poetical justice. A man who would go and deliberately spend five shillings on a shawl for his wife when he might have purchased with it fifteen quarts of beer at the Dog and Duck had no right to appeal for sympathy.

Bo'sprit's remark, following upon the exhaustive observations of Round Tommy, supplied sufficient food for reflection for the rest of the afternoon. Each man had his own particular measure of grievance. It had been a hard blow to all of them, but there was more of sorrow than of anger in their eyes as they looked out over the silent, sobbing sea.

Knut, still lazily lying in the doorway as if he, too, were a 'Longshore man, pricked up his ears as a step came down the High Street along by the bend where, it seemed to him half a century ago, he had knocked down Mr. Dumfy. His ears dropped and his eyes closed again after a moment's listening. He knew the step well enough. It was Mr. Griggs.

Even if he had not known the step, and he knew almost every footfall in Saxton, Knut would have recognised Mr. Griggs. None but he would have walked on the sunny side of the street on a day like this. But Mr. Griggs rarely found the sun too hot. 'The season'

made no direct difference to him. Indirectly, it might have helped him, as bringing a little money into town, and a portion of it may eventually have reached his hand. But people who came down from London to spend a month on the Terrace didn't usually take back with them an assortment of dining-room chairs or a brass bedstead. Mr. Griggs only wished they did.

To him 'the season' was the one period of the year when he was free from a cold in the head.

'We just begin to get warm, my dear, and comfortable when the fire goes out like, and we're as bad off as ever.'

This was the remark he made regularly every September in the revolving years, as a certain watery look about the eyes and a growing redness about the nostrils announced the return of influenza.

In August the watery springs seemed to have dried up. There was a pleasant absence

of dampness about Mr. Griggs, and his spirits rose to quite unusual heights.

On this broiling afternoon he walked briskly as the pleasant heat beat upon the red roofs, the brown walls, and the small panes of the shops in High Street. Not a soul was out but himself. He turned into Mr. Goldfinch's, which he found unpleasantly cool, and discovered quite a gathering of cronies.

Goldfinch himself was perched high up on his stool by the door. Mr. Burnap was seated on half a bag of coffee set down by the counter; whilst Mr. Firminger, with his face like a boiled beetroot, was mopping his forehead.

'Good afternoon, gentlemen all,' said Mr. Griggs. 'Nice pleasant day, though perhaps a little so-so in the shade.'

'What d'ye mean by a little so-so in the shade?' growled Mr. Firminger, making himself hotter than ever by violent gymnastic exercises with his pocket-handkerchief.

‘It’s my opinion, Griggs, there’s only one place hot enough for you, and that can’t be mentioned with Mrs. Goldfinch in the back parlour,’ said Mr. Burnap.

‘Well, I do like heat I allow, I like to be warm and comfortable,’ said Mr. Griggs apologetically.

‘You should have gone out with Mr. Fleyce then,’ piped Mr. Goldfinch. ‘They’re mostly blacks there I’ve been told, or Chaneymen, which comes to the same thing.’

‘No they don’t,’ said Mr. Firminger, exasperated by the heat of the weather and not soothed by the recollection of the closed doors of Castle Fleyce and the sudden stoppage of bountiful orders. ‘They’re as different as beef and veal. Besides, the blacks is only occasional. I do believe,’ he continued, fiercely turning upon Mr. Burnap, who had got the coolest corner in the shop, besides having something to sit upon, ‘that Goldfinch thinks all Amerycans is born black.’

‘Well, neighbour, that’s neither here nor there,’ said Mr. Burnap, enjoying his ease. ‘The thing is, is he going to stop in Ameryca, or is he coming back to do what he ought by the town, after giving us all this trouble, and lavishing us out into all that expense we’d never have thought of only for him.’

‘Mr. Tandy’s the only man that knows anything about him, except this Captain O’Brien, who’s always down here now, and they’d snap the nose off your face if you asked a question.’

‘They’ve made a good thing out of him, anyhow,’ said Mr. Burnap. ‘The curate’s mother told my missus that he gave Tandy’s girl a di’mond necklace with stones as big as Koeynores, and that O’Brien had bled him to the tune of 5,000*l*.’

‘I always fancied that old Tandy would hook him for a son-in-law. He was always out with the girl and she a following him up to the Castle. If he’s given her this necklace as

Goldfinch talks of, I expect he means something ;' and Mr. Firminger dealt himself a violent mop on the forehead almost sufficient to have felled an ox.

'Well,' said Mr. Griggs, 'I don't know that that would be such a bad thing for you, neighbours, if it came about. It's nothing to me, I have had my say to Castle Fleyce.'

'And a good long say it was,' observed Mr. Firminger.

He could not tolerate Mr. Griggs at any time, least of all in August, when he looked so aggravatingly cool.

'What I did 's neither here nor there. We're all tradesmen and 'ave to live, and what I mean to say is that he may as well marry in the town as out of it.'

'So as he marry's at all, settles down at the Castle, lets us go on as we used, and perhaps come out again at the next election, we'll wish him joy,' said Mr. Burnap.

'Ah! I always said that that election

wouldn't come to much, carried on the way it was,' Mr. Goldfinch said regretfully. 'I recollect in 1832——'

'1832 be blowed!' cried the irascible Firringer. 'I'm a man that comes down on the block, and what I want to know is what are we going to do in 1882, which is nigh on us. I don't mind sayin' in this company, not wishing it to go farder, I often had a bill for 10*l.* a week for jints, and that's something to think of in a place like this.'

'Griggs is quite right,' said Mr. Burnap from the judgment-seat on the coffee sack. 'All's well as ends well I say, and if he marries old Tandy's daughter it'll be for the benefit of the town. And she's not a bad sort of girl, I say, though a little uppish at times, and has a way of putting ill-convenient questions. The way she set on me about the mortar when we was working up at the Castle was enough to make your head ache. "Miss Tandy," I says to her at last, "you leave the mixing of the mortar to

me, and I'll leave the making of pies to you." Rather think I had her there.'

'I expect she'd a notion you was doing it cheap,' growled Mr. Firminger. 'I don't know much about her, and don't want to. It's not much butcher's meat goes in through old Tandy's door. But for a man with a perpetual cold in his head, I'll allow Griggs's not far out. If Tandy's played his game and got this rich man for a son-in-law he's quite right.'

'Suppose he's as rich as they say?' Mr. Goldfinch piped from his perch.

'Rich!' cried Mr. Burnap. 'Why, I believe he's a millynar. I've heard tell that his father, the old gentleman Dumfy cut up—sly, sneaking fellow that Dumfy!—had money in everything that was going, besides a lump he kept in his safe. Fleyce has got every penny. Could buy us all up, and build as many castles as he liked.'

'Ah well, neighbours,' said Mr. Griggs, rubbing his hands together and pulling up his coat collar as if he felt a draught somewhere,

‘that’s a man we all respects, and he oughtn’t to be missed out of Saxton. If he comes back and marries Miss Tandy, all I can say is they’ll have my best wishes. Don’t you find it a little chilly in here?’

‘Chilly!’ roared Mr. Firminger, apparently on the verge of apoplexy.

But Mr. Griggs was gone before his wrath could descend.

‘It’s my firm belief,’ said Mr. Firminger, as he made a dash for the shady side of the street, ‘that there Griggs was born to be a snail, only they couldn’t get a house as would fit his back.’

CHAPTER L.

THE PERIL OF POPPIES.

THERE was a good deal of truth in these casual remarks from the lips of the worthy gentlemen whom chance had so nearly made Gideon's constituents. The discovery of the skeleton in the old gentleman's cupboard had been followed by Gideon's immediate release, by every mark of profound regret on the part of the authorities, and amid a jubilation that seemed national. People held their breath to think how nearly, as Napper had put it weeks ago, a fresh murder had been committed.

Gideon might now have supped plentifully of the cup of pleasure which had tasted so delicious to him when he first appeared in

the streets of Saxton as the Liberal candidate and heard the people whisper, 'That's him!' If there had been a seat in Parliament vacant, and Gideon had sued for the suffrages of the people, he would have been sent in at the head of the poll against any candidate who might have come forward.

In addition to being a great people we are a people of generous emotions, and when any miscarriage of justice takes place there are no bounds to the desire of the populace to make more or less appropriate amends.

But Gideon shrank from the popular acclaim. A man cannot stand so near the gates of death as he had done without undergoing some change in himself, even though the effect be transitory. Gideon was altered and improved. He would never in any circumstances have been a great man—great of soul, I mean—nor a thoroughly good man. But he was decidedly a man whose nature was impressionable, and he was right in his belief that, were Napper

by his side, life would for him have taken on a fairer and a better aspect.

He could not think of Napper now, at least not in that way, because he felt the taint of the prison was on him still. He smelled its breath in English air wherever he went, and he felt an overmastering desire to get away out of the country for a time. He had a fantastic longing to live in a prairie for a few weeks or even months. His idea of what a prairie was was exceedingly vague. At least it was big and boundless, and full of fresh air, and there was the unfathomable expanse of the heavens above.

In these respects he felt it would diametrically differ from the dungeon he had left, and was therefore desirable.

When Napper came to him in the cell, bringing the basket of roses, Gideon believed he was looking his last on this world, and as he followed her out with sorrowful hungry eyes he felt that the bitterness of death was past.

Now that he was again a free man, the picture,

momentarily flashed against the darkness of his cell, lived with him still. Night and day he saw Napper wearing that last sorrowful look, and perhaps will continue so to see her, though in fainter lines, to the last day of his life. At any moment he could close his eyes and behold her as in the flesh, with head half turned as she reached the cell door, the tears streaming down her cheeks, and withal eyes and mouth making brave efforts to smile.

No April day so fair, and surely none so tender! In his exalted state of mind Gideon felt that to be wept for by Napper was almost worth the pain of dying.

Now it was all over he cherished the memory of the last look she had cast upon him, and would not have it dimmed till he should come back after the lapse of a year or so, and ask her to marry him.

It was asking now. No more of King Cophetua and the beggar maid. She was now the Queen and he the suppliant.

Of all which Napper had no more idea than had Knut as he lay stretched out on the doorstep blinking in the sun, and from time to time slightly cocking his ears at the faintest sound, whether it came from the house or the street. Gideon had written to Napper expressing his gratitude to her for saving his life. It was O'Brien who had represented it to Gideon in that light, enlarging with quite surprising eloquence on the shrewdness of Napper's perception and of the persistency with which she had urged both her father and himself to fresh efforts, resulting in the discovery of Mr. Dumfy's remains and the freedom of the condemned prisoner.

Mr. Tandy had added some details which showed that O'Brien had done a great deal more for Gideon's deliverance than appeared on the face of his modest narrative. Gideon took note of this and was not unmindful of it. He was wealthy now, rich beyond his utmost hopes. As to his land schemes, they had melted into thin air. The mortgagees had foreclosed

and taken possession. But the fortune accumulated by the Spider had exceeded all computation.

The Spider's fortune was in marketable securities, that could be turned into cash at any time, and Gideon converted some of it into a cheque for 5,000*l.*, which he sent to O'Brien. He had always done things handsomely in money matters, and this was no time to be niggardly. But for O'Brien, working under the inspiration of Napper, Gideon would have closed all his earthly accounts, including that of his banker. So he sent the 5,000*l.* with a few words of hearty thanks.

To Napper also he wrote a letter, tinged with the literary style that had offended the severely critical taste of Mr. Jack Bailey, but still creditable to his feelings. He begged her acceptance of a slight acknowledgment of the inestimable service she had done him, and hoped that when he returned in a year or so from the new world on the other side

of the Atlantic he might be privileged to see her wearing the necklace, and discover in its light the dawning of a new world for him.

The hidden meaning of this latter phrase was beyond Napper's penetration. She attributed it to Mr. Fleyce's florid style, and supposed he was going to make a fresh start in business or politics. But the necklace was tangible and unmistakable. It was of diamonds of the purest water, and, as Mr. Tandy surmised, of fabulous value. Napper protested against the acceptance of the present, a little more feebly after trying it on and surveying the effect in the glass. In the end Mr. Tandy and O'Brien (who as usual chanced to be in the family circle) prevailed, and the necklace was put away in Mr. Tandy's strong box.

‘It's perfectly ridiculous my having a thing like that,’ Napper said. ‘When could I wear it except once a year at the County Ball, and then I should only stir up strife by outshining other and richer girls?’

‘I dare say, my dear, there will be some other occasion,’ said Mr. Tandy, on whom new lights were breaking.

In the fulness of his heart Gideon had proposed to do something handsome for Jack Bailey. If he thought the *Beacon* could be revived Gideon would do whatever was necessary in the way of money, and would hand it over to Jack as a free gift.

This was a great temptation to Jack. The sacred light of the *Beacon* had been kept feebly burning through the troubled times that had befallen its proprietor. But it was not the desire to fan it into a blaze that temporarily excited Jack. To edit the *Beacon* meant to live in Saxton, and Jack felt the incessant longing in that direction that the moth feels for the candle.

After a severe struggle he bravely resolved to keep out of temptation, and from his untidy apartment that served the double purpose of bedroom and study, and with a head full of ache, a heart full of sadness, and a

stomach considerably less than half full of food, he wrote a letter of thanks and acknowledgment which conveyed to Gideon's mind the impression that Mr. J. Bellamy Bailey was really so overwhelmed with lucrative work that, whilst fully appreciating Gideon's kindness, he could not think of accepting his well-meant offer.

Knut, still brooding over 'a something in the world amiss' that sent fat flies in summer weather when he felt too lazy to catch them, suddenly sprang to his feet, and with every limb rigid, his head slightly bent on one side, and his right ear pricked up, listened. With a proper direction of the energy thus displayed, and for which he had failed to give himself credit, there was not a blue-bottle fly within ten feet of him that would have lived to see the sun go down.

But Knut was not thinking of flies nor of Mr. Firminger, who, with his hat off and his shirt open at the collar, was walking down the street on the shady side. There was no

sound that Mr. Firminger could hear, had he stopped to listen. But Knut heard it, and presently it became distinct enough—a firm, steady step coming down the silent street, round the bend ever memorable by reason of Mr. Dumfy's fall.

Before the figure came into view Knut was off, bounding like a colt in a field, and, utterly regardless of the fact that the thermometer marked 90° in the shade, danced frantically round O'Brien. He liked the Captain for many reasons, but he hailed his coming with an especial delight since it presaged a walk, sometimes a ramble over the country, or occasionally a stroll down to the beach, where the Captain flung bits of stick into the sea and Knut brought them out again.

Knut dashed down the street, barking joyously, making playful dashes at the Captain's heels, and presently rushing into the house in the most ecstatic manner to inform Napper of the fresh arrival.

‘Are you and Knut going for a walk to-day, Miss Tandy?’ the Captain asked as Napper appeared at the door with Knut in a paroxysm of delight which in the state of the weather threatened to end with apoplexy.

‘I was thinking of it,’ Napper said; ‘but don’t you think it’s a little hot for walking?’

‘Hot! not in the least,’ the Captain said, his manly forehead glowing with perspiration and assurance. ‘There’s a nice breeze blowing in from the sea, and if you’ll take me with you I’ll show you a shady walk up to the Downs.’

‘Thank you very much, Captain O’Brien,’ Napper said with a little curtsy. ‘I shall be so glad for you to show me about Saxton. It will be quite a treat.’

It was not difficult to find a shady walk about Saxton. There was one so narrow that two people could scarcely walk abreast in it unless they were content to walk very close together, almost with shoulders touching. In

winter time it served the purpose of a stream, which had doubtless first marked out the track. In summer it was a grassy lane sunk below the level of the fields whose luxuriant hedgerows almost met overhead. Here ferns and wild flowers grew in lavish profusion; here the birds built their nests and sang all day, and here Napper and Captain O'Brien slowly walked whilst Knut made dilligent inquisition into the herbage and about the gnarled roots of the immemorial trees.

Neither Napper nor the Captain seemed in the humour for talking. Perhaps it was enough joy to be alone on this bright summer day. Napper had taken off her straw hat and held it on her arm, basket-wise. Here and there were openings in the trees, and the sunlight fell upon a very pretty sight when it touched Napper's golden hair and crossed with bars of light her simple muslin frock.

‘Have you finished the Memoirs of Princess Metternich, Miss Tandy?’ O'Brien asked.

He was loth to break the delicious pause, but he had something to say, and, being determined that it should be said before they left the lane, was beating about the bush for some discreet way of saying it.

‘Yes, I have read them twice.’

‘Then perhaps you will lend the work to me. I should like to read it again. Do you remember the day I called in and you were reading a passage to your father?’

‘Was I?’ Napper said with slight tokens of uneasiness. ‘Yes, I often read to him.’

‘I remember the very passage,’ O’Brien went on hurriedly. ‘It’s where the Princess talks about her husband working, and her desire to lean over his shoulder to see how he writes his despatches. I thought that a very charming scene.’

‘Oh, there’s a beautiful cluster of poppies!’ Napper said, wishing she were safe at home.

I suppose all girls recognise the approach of the supreme moment in their lives when a

man is about to ask them to marry. It is said by coarse-minded persons that this natural tendency is so strong that some girls occasionally go in advance of facts and begin to tremble with apprehension when their companion has no design to frighten them.

Napper was certainly not of this last class. Otherwise she would never have been trapped on the Downs by Jack Bailey. It was her absolute guilelessness that brought on that catastrophe. If she had not, with sisterly intent, laid her small hand on Jack's arm and looked kindly into his eyes, he might peradventure have escaped, at least for the day.

With Captain O'Brien everything was different. He had never spoken a word of love to her, nor had he ever looked at her with those almost fierce eyes which, she remembered with a shudder, were bent upon her by Jack Bailey. That he gazed at her sometimes with wistful glances she knew. Looking up suddenly from her work or reading, when she and her father

and the Captain were seated in the dining-room with its heavy red curtains and its softened light, she had more than once caught him in the act.

What was a marvel to her was how she should know, whilst her own eyes were bent down, that his were feasting on her face. She rightly supposed that other people sometimes looked hard at her when her attention was otherwise engrossed. But she knew nothing of it, or only learned it by the mere accident of turning her head. Yet she felt with strange fluttering at her heart that she knew quite well without looking when Captain O'Brien's eyes were bent upon her. She had tried the experiment more times than she would like to count, and had never once been wrong.

Possibly this may have been due to the fact that the insatiable Captain never took his eyes off her if without being positively rude he might enjoy the contemplation of her fair face bent down over book or work.

Naturally in such circumstances when Napper, who of course need not have been thinking of him, suddenly looked up she would meet his glance. What maddened her was her total inability on these occasions to command the tide of her blood. She was as helpless in this respect as Knut down at the beach in his daily conflict with the obstinate ocean. She felt she was blushing, and the more angry she was with herself the rosier she grew, and, as Captain O'Brien thought, the more bewitching.

Not that he remained at gaze when detected. He was as timid as Napper, and turned quickly away to become supernaturally absorbed in some other subject. But it is wonderful what two pair of eyes can in certain circumstances see between them in a measure of space not longer than a flash of lightning.

The Captain saw that Napper was troubled under his regard and felt miserably guilty, making hot oaths that he would never sin any more. Napper saw that he was embarrassed,

and between them the two found sufficient in this simple incident to feed reflection for hours and sometimes days.

The innate absurdity of the whole thing was sometimes demonstrated on the very same evening. Mr. Tandy looking up from his paper, and catching a glimpse of Napper seated by the lamp at the other end of the table, paused to look at her, a quiet fair picture framed by the dusky walls of the low-roofed room. If Napper happened to look up and caught his eye, she smiled back upon him a bright smile full of love and perfect confidence ; or perhaps, as she began to think of late days, of almost perfect confidence, with just one little corner of her heart into which not even the playmate of her childhood and the friend and companion of her womanhood might pry.

No blushing then or trembling or desperate efforts to take sudden interest in something near at hand. It was a curious and strongly marked difference. But of course she had known

her father a long time, and Captain O'Brien was, as it were, but an acquaintance of yesterday.

Having come late, the Captain determined to make up for lost opportunities. He had taken up his residence at Saxton, or had at least permanently engaged a couple of rooms on the Terrace, and was much more in them than in his London chambers.

Of course this arose out of his anxiety on account of Gideon, and of the necessity for constant conferences with Mr. Tandy and Napper on the steps to be taken for proving his innocence.

When these efforts had triumphed O'Brien found himself so fagged by overwork and the strain of excitement that nothing would suit him but Saxton with its soft airs from sea and land. So he remained on or about the spot, and no day passed of which some hours were not spent with Napper, oftenest of course in the decorous company of Mr. Tandy, but sometimes, as chanced to-day, with Napper all to himself.

All this infallibly led up to danger, and Napper felt with swift instinct that the moment was at hand.

Out of her confused thoughts there arose a clearly defined desire for delay. She was not at all sure that ultimate salvation was possible. But a few minutes would be precious.

‘I am so fond of poppies,’ she said, looking hard at them as if there was danger of their presently disappearing and this was her last chance of noting their shape and colour. ‘Do you think you could get them for me?’

The Captain certainly thought he could, and did, with a feeling not altogether free from satisfaction at being temporarily relieved from a situation which he too felt was growing embarrassing.

But the poppies only led to swifter catastrophe.

Napper sat down on a felled tree whilst the Captain struggled through the hedge and brought back in triumph the poppies. Sitting

there and not quite knowing what she did, she twined the poppies in her hair, at sight of which added loveliness the hapless Captain hopelessly broke down.

‘Napper!’ he said.

She started at the familiar name spoken by O’Brien for the first time.

‘Do you remember something in a poem I have heard you read, about the maiden who

Fronted unuttered words and said them nay,
And smiled down love till it had nought to say?’

Napper remembered very well; she also called to mind the next verse, where it is written—

She raised to me her quiet eyelids twain,
And looked me this reply—look calm yet bland—
‘I shall not know, I will not understand.’

Perhaps she might take a hint from this. Whilst her fingers nervously played with the harmless poppies, she raised her eyes to her companion and quite intended to reproduce the ‘look calm yet bland.’

But, alas! alas! poor Napper never was very good at making-believe. What she saw when she looked up was an honest, manly face, with eyes that looked gravely but fondly into her own.

O'Brien on his part must have seen something there other than the calm, bland regard which should have looked forth from them, or he would never have dared to lay his great brown hand upon the little one that held the crushed poppies.

After a little while he said—

‘Dearest Napper, I have not lived a very noble life hitherto. I think it has been a little wearisome and wasteful. But I have long felt, more and more in these past few weeks, that it might be otherwise. Your love would be to me like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Will you give it me?’

At this precise moment Knut returned from one of his frequent excursions up and down the lane, and stood a moment, his eyes fixed upon the couple seated on the felled tree.

From what he saw it was borne in upon him that two are company and three are none. So, like a sagacious dog, he with every affectation of urgent business on hand trotted off on a distant errand, and I don't know that we could do better than follow his example.

THE END.

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